JOHN F. AUTRY

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THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY ON THE MINOR PROPHETS

THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT

ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN

WITH CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES, INDEXES, ETC., ETC.

By VARIOUS AUTHORS

In Twenty-One Volumes

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
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A HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

MINOR PROPHETS

BY THE
REV. JAMES WOLFENDALE

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HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

HOSEA.

Introduction and Preface.

The Prophet. *Hosea* = salvation, deliverance, from the same root as Joshua and Jesus; the son of Beeri, a native of Israel, whose sins and fates he chiefly records. The name in marked contrast to his mission—announcement of ruin; yet in harmony with his vocation and the object of his book—to proclaim deliverance after judgment. Nothing known concerning the circumstances of his life. His character and disposition gathered from his prophecy.

The Age. More or less contemporary with Isaiah, Amos, Jonah, Joel, and Nahum. Probably entered upon his work in the last year of Jeroboam, and ended it at the beginning of Hezekiah's reign, i. e., about 60 years, from 784—722 B.C. "The shortest duration must have been some 65 years" [*Pusey*]. Others give a much longer period. This is the darkest period in the history of Israel. The obligations of the law were relaxed and the claims of religion disregarded. Baal was a rival to Jehovah, and in the dark recesses of groves were practised the cruel rites of idolatry. The land was distracted by domestic broils and foreign invasion. Might was marshalled against right. Princes and priests were accused of bribery and impiety. Murder and bloodshed were steps to the throne; stream met stream and deluged the land like a flood. "Remonstrance was useless; the knowledge of God was wilfully rejected; the people hated rebuke; the more they were called the more they refused; they forbade their prophets to prophesy; and their false prophets hated God greatly. All attempts to heal this disease only showed its incurableness" [*Pusey*]. Foreign nations are unheeded. Lycurgus the famous legislator, and Hesiod the Greek poet, lived during his ministry, but the prophet was intensely concerned with his own people. The threatened invasion came, and he saw the murder of the tribes and the ravages of the enemy. Invitations and warnings are replete with tenderness and woe. All is shrouded in darkness and gloom. Visions send forth lightning and thunder; but the sun breaks forth at last, and rainbow colours expand until encircled with brilliancy and hope. God in wrath remembers mercy.

The Book written by the author whose name it bears—the first of the twelve

minor prophets, probably so placed on account of length, and resemblance to the greater prophets in earnest tone and vivid representation. *Its Contents.* Externally set forth national apostasy, prevailing corruption and judgments from God on account of that apostasy. Severe threatenings are mixed with gracious promises. Israel chastised would return in penitence to God; the kingdom would be restored and the people united under one head. Internally truths are presented, in form and language peculiar. Israel is viewed in the light of Jehovah's love. This love is often wounded and chastises; is ever active and unchangeable, calls and heals. *Its Style* is bold, often abrupt, and for the most part mere hints. There are changes in figure, anomalies in gender, number, and person. We have fragments, a general summary, and fourteen short chapters include all that is left of perhaps the longest ministry in Old Testament record. "Each verse forms a whole for itself, like one heavy toll in a funeral knell. The prophet has not been careful about order and symmetry, so that each sentence went home to the soul" [*Pusey*]. Messianic references, not very numerous, lie in allusions, and may be gathered from New Testament citations. *Its Analysis* rather difficult—the following may help the student. *First Period or Division,* before the fall of Jehu's house, chaps. i. ii. and iii. Israel's sin and rejection, chap. i.; Israel's chastisement and conversion, chap. ii.; Israel's deeper guilt, prolonged punishment, and final restoration, chap. iii. *Second Period or Division,* after the fall of Jehu's house. I. *The Threatenings* against the idolatrous people, chap. iv.; against conniving priests, chaps. v. and vi.; against the royal court for unholy alliance, chap. vii.; judgment ending in Assyrian bondage, chaps. viii.—x. II. *The Promises.* God will have mercy, chap. xi.; complaint resumed, chap. xii.; Israel's deeper fall, chap. xiii.; Israel's conversion and richer blessings, chap. xiv. Keil's division has much to recommend it. Each of the two main sections, chaps. i.—iii., iv.—xiv., is divided into three smaller ones, (i. 2—ii. 3), (ii. 4—25), (iii.), (iv.—vi. 3), (vi. 4—xi. 11), (xii. 11—xiv.). In the Criticism we seek to bring out the meaning of the text, in the Homiletics to frame and apply that meaning for improvement in pulpit ministrations and the practical pursuits of life.

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**2. By**] Lit. in Hosea, the preposition expresses close relationship with another; cf. Num. xii. 6, 8; Heb. ii. 1. First *in* us and then *through* us is the Divine order; personal enlightenment and then public service. **Wife of whore.**] A vision, some; externally acted, others; taken in a real sense by most interpreters. The plural indicates not merely incidental, but continual and manifold acts [*Pusey*]. **Take**] i. e. marry one whose livelihood is gained by prostitution, and whose whole element is whoredom. Cf. men of blood, Ps. v. 7; man of sorrows, Is. liii. 3. This is a symbol of Israel in its state of idolatry. **Land**] Israel, indirectly Judah, wife and children, equally grieved the husband and father, Ezek. xvi. 8, 15. **Committed** is *whoring, whoring away, from Jehovah*, lit. from after Jehovah; the composite preposition denoting more than absence from God, signifies opposed to walking with him; the breaking of the marriage vow, cut off from loving relationship (Ps. lxxiii. 27). **3. Gom.**] The name of a nation (Gen. x. 2, 3); symbolically G. = completion; i. e. completely given up to whoredom. **Dib.**] = daughter of grape-cakes, indicating pleasure and sensuality. "The sweetness of sins is the parent of destruction" [*Pusey*]. **4. Jez.**] = I will sow, scatter or disperse, like a seedsman, which happened by the Assyrians (2 Kings xvii. 5, 6). **Avenge**] Heb. visit. Jehu commanded to destroy the house of Ahab, externally obeyed, and rewarded in measure. He acted not from principle, or as he pretended out of zeal, but to serve his own political ends (2 Kings ix. 10, 36; x. 16). "And so the blood which was shed according to the righteous judgment of God, became sin to *him* who shed it, in order to fulfil, not the will of God, but his own" [*Pusey*]. **Jez.** symbol of past sins, intermediate punishment and final overthrow. **5. Bow**] Might, military prowess (Gen. xlix. 24; Jer. xlix. 35). **6. Daughter**] A symbol of a degenerate race, some; of the totality of men and women of the nation, others; seems to intensify **Lo-ruh.**] = not pitied, lit. I will not add any more to. The original expresses tender yearning towards one (Rom. ix. 25; 1 Pet. ii. 10); but God would not continue to show compassion as he had done; Divine mercy exhausted and Israel was left in a defenceless state. **I will utterly**] Lit. taking away, I will take away everything they have. Marg. another sense, to take away, i. e. to forgive sin. **7. The Lord their God**] More emphatic than "through me" (Gen. xix. 24). Judah worshipped God; Israel turned to idols. One a witness for God, the other apostates from God. Judah saved in marked contrast to Israel punished. **9. Lo-am.**] = not my people; the covenant relation dissolved. *Son* may typify the revival of strength in the reign of Jeroboam II., but prosperity brought no revival of piety. They were not God's people. **Not be your God**] Lit. I will not be to you or for you; "*for you* by providence, *to you* by love" [*Pusey*]. Deprivation of all that God can be to them. When God ceases to belong to men, to compassionate them, rejection follows. **11. Gathered together**] in one body. **One head**] Zerubbabel typically, Christ really (Jer. iii. 18; Ezek. xxxiv. 22). **Go up**] from Babylon, from whence God restored the two tribes; typ. = deliverance from sin and moral dignity; go up from sinful life, join the Christian Church and march to the land of promise. **Great, &c.**] Not as ver. 4. God will increase in mercy, not scatter in displeasure. Where Israel was overthrown, victory shall be achieved. Instead of no mercy and not my people, we have mercy and my people. Great and glorious the day when the fortunes of Israel shall be reversed and the fulness of the Gentiles come in.

HOMILETICS.

THE FIRST COMMUNICATIONS.—*Verse* 1.

I. The chosen servant. 1. *His human descent.* "Son of B." The Jews say that the prophet whose father is named was the son of a prophet. Nothing recorded of Ber. Hosea dignified and distinguished not by noble birth nor worldly grandeur. Rank and riches are not moral worth. Life outlined by noble deeds; greatness acquired by religious service. Character in its noblest embodiments, exhibits the highest qualities, commands the greatest influence and admiration. Apostles of great thoughts and rulers of the human mind have sprung from no exclusive rank in life, but have been called from schools of the prophets and workshops of the poor. 2. *His spiritual training.* God spoke *in* Hosea; gave him knowledge and experience first, then commissioned him to teach others. Personal dedication before public duty; fellowship in private before reward in public. We must speak what we know; be blessed ourselves before we can bless others. This is a law of Christian economy. We can only teach others as we are taught ourselves. Our influence upon others must be measured by the Divine gifts within us. The best proof of Christianity is the energy with which we can Christianize. God bestows blessings not to nurse in our bosoms but to radiate in beneficent influence to others. "I will bless thee and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing." 3. *His outward call.* Probably when a young man,

and hence the length of his ministry. Samuel and Timothy given to God when young. Jeremiah consecrated from the womb. An honour and privilege to serve God in youth. Energy and enthusiasm are necessary as well as talent and experience. "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth." **II. The Divine message.** 1. *Its nature.* A "word," the expression of the mind and purpose of God. The power of a word to influence character and change the destinies of life. Words of monarchs have decided the fate of empires. The word of God, judgment or mercy, the message of life or death to a people. "To the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other of life unto life." 2. *Its origin.* "The word of the Lord." Not by man nor from man, not self-originated; it was first God's and then became the prophet's. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man." Men not left to their own devices and must not declare their own opinions. God finds the message and speaks with Divine certainty and authority. All teaching deserving the name comes to us not as the product of human thought but of the Holy Spirit. "Preach the preaching I bid thee." The Bible is pre-eminently the prophetic word. "Ye do well that ye take heed to it." 3. *Its medium.* Through Hosea. God's message through men and to men. Man in his moral nature is renewed, elevated, and qualified to teach and bless a fallen people. This displays Divine wisdom and love, creates sympathy for our fellow-creatures, humanizes the Bible, and renders the gospel more charming and attractive. **III. The dark days.** 1. *Days of prevalent idolatry.* "The land hath committed whoredoms." Idolatry was made the national religion. The worship of Baal was a rival to the worship of God. Calf-worship led to sin, licentiousness and sensuality. The first in rank were first in excess. Sad when men of high position fall into vice! Now, even, men profess to own God, talk of "nature" and "natural laws," yet forget God, or "change their glory (i.e. their God) into the similitude" of an ox, a man, a hero, or an abstract principle. 2. *Days of political anarchy.* Kings came to the throne by the murder of their predecessors and were in turn murdered by their successors. Military despotism disturbed the peace, and horrible slaughter stained the people of the land. 3. *Days of threatened judgment.* Hosea sent to urge to repentance, for captivity was imminent, certain, and irreversible; but God was forsaken, the nation was insensible of its moral and political decay, and judgments lost their terror. In spite of warning after warning the people sought to prop themselves up by alliance with Egypt and Assyria. When a nation is rotten at the core no outward power or splendour can prevent its decay. It carries within it the seeds of death. The sky grew darker and darker; the thunder at last resounded; calamities could not be averted; then judgments fell upon them without mercy in dispersion and destruction. 4. *Days of little success.* Israel was not converted but taken into captivity, yet Hosea laboured on year after year, through good and evil report (Amos vii. 10, 12). No abatement of his earnestness and efforts. He was faithful to his trust and to his God. It is often the lot of God's servants to labour long and see little fruit. Isaiah cried, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain." We must be content to toil on and deliver our message to the greatest sinners in the darkest days, and feel like the prophet named, "surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

In the days of, ver. 1.—Hosea's ministry. 1. *A type of God's long suffering and mercy;* waiting long, sending prophets, and offering grace to a sinful people, until beyond the reach of mercy. 2. *A type of service fixed in time and sphere,* in chequered scenes and great discouragements. God gives to every servant his special place and peculiar gifts. In hope and humble confidence he must labour on.

The days of Jeroboam II., days of

prosperity and political pre-eminence. He reigned 41 years; recovered lost cities (2 Kings xiv. 28; Amos i. 3, 5); was victorious in war (2 Kings xiii. 4; xiv. 26); and enjoyed the teaching of Hosea, Joel (iii. 16), Amos (i. 1), and Jonah (2 Kings xiv. 25). But idolatry was mixed with the worship of Jehovah; drunkenness and oppression prevailed in the country, and the prophets predicted its downfall. 1. *Temporal prosperity is no guarantee for public morality.* The kingdom, amid splendour and popularity, rotten at the core, decaying in vigour, and under the judgment of God. 2. *Temporal prosperity is no security against public calamity.* "Temporal prosperity is no proof either of stability or of the favour of God. Where the law of God is observed, there, even amid the pressure of outward calamity, is the assurance of ultimate prosperity. Where God is disobeyed, there is the pledge of coming destruction. The seasons when men feel most secure against future chastisements, are often the preludes of the most signal revolutions" [*Pusey*].

Kings rise and empires fall, but God's purpose is the same; carried on through all times and by all agencies. Kings die and are buried in the dust; prophets live in all ages and rewarded in eternity. "Monarchs have their times and their turns, their rise and their ruin" [*Trapp*].

Men pass away — notwithstanding wealth and talent. Nations pass away — notwithstanding political power and military glory. God is eternal and carries on his work.

The perpetuity of truth. Although these kings successively appeared and passed away, the ministry of Hosea kept on. 1. The "Word of the Lord" is *adapted* to all generations. It is congruous with all intellects, it chimes in with all hearts, it provides for the common wants of all. 2. The "Word of the Lord" is *necessary* for all generations. All men in all ages and lands want it, it is as indispensable to their happiness as air is to their life. Generations may appear in the distant future, who may not require our forms of government, our social institutions, our artistic devices, our mechanical inventions, and who may despise our literary productions, but no generation will ever appear who will not require the "Word of the Lord" [*Homilist*].

HOMILETICS.

The Symbolic Marriage.—*Verse* 2.

Whether this be regarded as a real and external transaction, or a spiritual scenery, or allegorical description, all agree in taking it as a type of God's dealings with unfaithful Israel. Divine truth was to be acted, embodied in sensible signs and prophetic life. Hosea commanded to marry a prostitute and beget children, whose names, called by God himself, were to set forth the evils of departure from him. **I. A type of Israel's fallen condition.** It was the chosen people, specially created and brought into covenant relation to God. This relation, often represented under the figure of marriage, they vowed to keep. But the contract was broken, they had fallen away from God, and gone a whoring after other gods. Idolatry was not accidental, but prevalent; the whole land was polluted, and the sin national. The idolatry of foreign nations was regarded as an abomination, but the sin of Israel a more glaring enormity and greater moral guilt. Three things are condemned in Scripture as idolatry. 1. The worshipping of a false god; 2. the worshipping of the true God through an image; 3. the indulgence of those passions which draw the soul from God. Israel were guilty of the first in bowing the knee to Baal, and of the second in setting up the golden calves. Men now often guilty of the third. Lust, covetousness, and pleasure allure their hearts, and they set up gold, honour, popular applause, and worldly distinction, as their god. "These be thy gods." **II. A type of God's love to sinners.** 1. *Love to the unfaithful.* Israel had fallen, but God loved her with a tender love, and sought

to restore her to himself. Many have made a profession, Christians have left their first love, broken their engagement with God, and fallen into disgrace. Love is wounded, and deeply wounded, at such treatment, but it remains love, cannot suffer apostasy from him, and seeks to restore and save. "Thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works." 2. *Love to the unworthy.* We shrink from the unchaste and condemn the outcast, but they are not beyond hope. The drunkard, the thief, and the idolater are renewed and restored to God, formed into a church, and sanctified for his service. "Love," it has been said, "*descends* more abundantly than it *ascends*. The love of parents for their children has always been far more powerful than that of children for their parents; and who among the sons of men ever loved God with a thousandth part of the love which God has manifested to us?" **III. A type of moral life unstained by surrounding evils.** The prophet was holy, separated from sinners, and dared not associate with adulterers. 1. In the family was a "wife of whoredoms" and "children of whoredoms." 2. In the land corruption and abominations were prevalent. What a trial of patience! What a test of character this would be! Christians are often so placed, but must be "the salt of the earth," preserve from corruption, and incite men to live godly in dangers by which they are surrounded. Even in Sardis were a few who had not defiled their garments. "To keep himself unspotted from the world." **IV. A type of parental sin portrayed in children's character.** Parents leave behind them legacies of guilt and shame; contaminate their offspring by their influence and example. Children inherit the lands and the lusts of their ancestors, and are often cursed with the consequences of parental folly. Drunkenness, debauchery, and adultery entail on human life their ruinous and loathsome effects. Men transmit to remote posterity guilt and misery, and God visits "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." This should excite pity for children and caution in parents for their solemn charge and responsibility.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Go, take, ver. 3.—1. A people sunk into sin and idolatry need desperate and extraordinary efforts to save them. 2. Men employed in saving them must deny themselves, and adopt the means God directs. Hosea takes a strange wife. Ezekiel loses his own, xxiv. 16, 17. Our will must be merged into God's. "This figure was proposed to the people that they might perceive in the looking-glass of this allegory, *first*, their duty towards God; *second*, their disloyalty; *thirdly*, their penalty for the same" [*Trapp*].

Idolatry is spiritual whoredom. It defiles the soul, God's bridal-bed. It breaks the marriage-knot, and discovenants. It enrageth God, who in this case will take no ransom. It subjecteth men to the deepest displeasure of God, it besots them and unmans them [*Trapp*].

Children of whoredom. The sins of parents also descend in a mysterious way on their children. Sin is contagious, and unless the entail is cut off by grace, hereditary [*Pusey*].

Depart from, God.—I. God is the great end of life. Man restless and insufficient without God. Natural bodies seek a natural resting-place; sensitive creatures seek good adapted to their rank and being: so the soul longs for God. Echoes of God resound through its depths, and it is made to turn instinctively towards Himself. Some have found and walk with God, like Enoch; some walk near to him and others are far from him. "Without God in the world." God should be the supreme object of life and affection. This pursuit should be earnest and continued. "My soul followeth hard after (is glued) to thee." The renewed soul is acquainted with God, and follows him with intensity of feeling and desire. When the Christian has lost God, he never rests

satisfied until he has found him again. When he has found and enjoys him he longs to enjoy him more. And though he can never attain to God in perfection, yet he follows on, first, as a necessary *discipline*, and then as a necessary *preparation* for the future. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

II. Departure from God is idolatry. Sin hinders and indisposes in the pursuit after God. It is a violation of his law and rejection of his love and authority. It renounces all subjection to him, and casts him off entirely. This is to prefer the creature to the Creator, in whom all joys and blessings consist. If we seek anything out of God, we turn from following him, and take something else to be our god. This is to make an idol, and prefer emptiness and vanity. An idol is nothing. Men have many idols. When they do not worship God, they worship themselves, their fellow-creatures, their works, and their substance. It is not necessary that each one should sing a psalm and offer a prayer to deify self. The outward life is a psalm, and the inward life a prayer. Man cannot dethrone God in heart and life without putting an idol in his place. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

III. This departure involves others in its consequences. Every individual is a centre of moral influence. Every word and deed sends forth more than electric fluid. He may choose what he will do, but having done, he cannot stay the consequences of the act. Kings and priests, ministers and parents, influence others for good or evil, produce effects which do not terminate on themselves, but extend to society, and are transmitted to posterity as mighty, indestructible forces of existence. "When one member suffers, all suffer with it." By neglect of duty, wrong example, and leading others into sin we injure our fellow-creatures, and leave an active influence, which does not cease when we repent or die. Wealth, language, and customs influence the health and morals of society. And as the seed sown will produce the harvest, so licentiousness and idolatry sow their fruits in families churches, nations, and fill "the earth with violence." "The land hath committed great whoredom."

HOMILETICS.

The Three Judgments.—*Verses* 3—9.

The names of the three children given by God himself were to be significant. The life of the prophet was to be a living sermon before the people. His marriage preached God's mercy, and his children God's judgment. If they refused his words, they should see his actions. In the first name we have a warning of terrible judgment, in the second its connection with the Divine nature, in the third the result. Destruction, cessation of mercy, and rejection, would be dreadful to any nation, but to Israel they involved the loss of special privileges and distinctions, their social, political, and theocratical position.

Jezreel; or Divine Retribution.—*Verses* 3—5.

I. The destruction of the Royal Family. "Upon the house of Jehu." J. anointed at God's command to execute judgment upon the house of Ahab (2 Kings ix. 6, 7); was rewarded in measure for his conduct, yet served his own ends, and in executing judgment upon others, brought it upon himself and family. God loves justice, and will punish those who administer it from wrong motives and feelings. Kings and men in authority must not fall short of duty, nor exceed it in any respect. "So awful a thing it is to be the instrument of God in punishing or reproving others if we do not by his grace keep our own hearts and hands pure from sin" [*Pusey*], that we may be rejected ourselves. The slaughter of the Gibeonites by Saul, the conduct of Amalek towards

Israel, seemed to be forgotten, but punishment came at last. Jehu's house is visited, his progeny extinguished in the fourth generation for his offences. If we judge others we should not do the same things ourselves. **II. The destruction of the Regal Sovereignty.** "And will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel." The strength of the kingdom was paralyzed after the destruction of the house of Jehu. Of five kings that followed Zechariah, only one died a natural death, the others were murdered and dethroned. The kingdom was distracted and broken, and in about 50 years completely destroyed by the captivity of the ten tribes. Kingdoms are built up, extended, and established by God; but the immorality of the rulers and the idolatry of the people will sow the seeds of decay and death. When God has numbered their days, no power, no splendour can hold them up. Foreign invasion and civil revolution may overturn. That kingdom is the strongest, the most splendid and secure, which makes God its sovereign. The skill of parliaments, the valour of soldiers, and the power of wealth are no security against the judgment of God. "Put them in fear, O Lord; that the nations may know themselves to be but men." **III. The destruction of Military Prowess.** "I will break the bow of Israel." The bow was the special pride of Jehu (2 Kings ix. 24); the military strength upon which Israel relied, and for which it was famous (Jer. xlix. 35). 1. *This strength shall be broken.* When God blows with the blast of his anger, individual health, family prosperity, and national glory fade like a flower. The strength of body, the vigour of mind, and the power of numbers are weak before him. God can humble the pride of men and nations, and take from them whatever they make their strength and defence. 2. *This strength shall be irreparably broken.* All power and projects defeated. When God breaks none can piece; when man pieces God can break. "The shield, the sword, and the battle," weapons offensive and defensive, God can dash in pieces. In the spiritual conflicts of this and every age, no weapon formed against his people and his purpose shall prosper. **IV. The destruction of National Prestige.** "In the valley of Jezreel." This valley was the very centre and security of the kingdom, their Marathon and their Waterloo. It was the scene of their exploits and skill; the place of Ahab's wickedness and Jehu's zeal. Here God had executed judgments against the enemies, and delivered his people from danger. In this very spot in which the nation's history was localized the nation's glory should fade away, and the nation's guilt be punished. Places of carnal security often exposed to shame and destruction. "Thus it is ever; when retribution comes it seems to despise the very things in which its victim gloried. A noble lineage, great wealth, patrimonial possessions, elevated positions, brilliant genius, and distinguished abilities; these are the modern Jezreels of sinners. In these they boast. But what are these? God, when he comes to judgment, will strike them in those very places, he will break their bow in the valley of Jezreel" [*The Homilist*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Jehu's conduct. 1. *Service insincere.* God's will done half way, not fully. He killed the priests, but clave to the calves. 2. *Service from wrong motives.* He acted not, as he pretended, out of zeal for God, but served his own political ends, and did God's will from selfish and base motives. 3. *Service divested of real virtue.* It had no principle in it, and of was no true worth in the sight of God. His piety gave way to policy, and policy stained his piety. "By the ends, and not by the works done, are virtues distinguished from vices. Two things make a good Christian, and declare him so—good actions and good aims. And although a good aim doth not make a bad action good (as in Uzziah), yet a bad aim makes a good action bad, as here in Jehu"

[*Trapp*]. 4. *Service involving his house and kingdom in ruin.* "The massacre therefore," says Calvin, "was a crime so far as Jehu was concerned, but with God it was a righteous vengeance." Even if he did not make God's command a mere pretext, yet his conduct was an act of blood-guiltiness which called for vengeance upon posterity. Things done by God's desire or command may become crimes in the performer, if he acts from evil and selfish designs, and not from love to God. Religion must never be a cloak for the lusts of an evil and ambitious heart. Retribution will swiftly follow. "Be sure your sins will find you out."

Jehu's character. J was one of those quick, ambitious men, whom God raises up to change the fate of empires and execute judgment upon the earth. His zeal was great so long as it squared with his own interests, but cooled wonderfully when directed against them. He was not a great or good man, but an agent for the accomplishment of great purposes. In his sudden elevation to the throne; in the ruthlessness with which he carried out his purposes; in the union of profound dissimulation with fanatic zeal, he is not without his likeness in modern times.

Jehu's punishment. "I will visit," &c. 1. *God's government.* God supreme, exalted above the heavens, and ruleth over the kings and nations of the earth. 2. *God's purpose.* "I *will* visit." This purpose not capricious and arbitrary; in harmony with fixed principles, and regards moral conduct and desert. 3. *God's providence.* "I will visit." The providence fulfils the purpose of God in the events of history and by the agencies of men. (1.) It *is active.* "I will visit." "My Father *worketh.*" "All things *work* together." (2.) *It is just* as well as benevolent. 4. *God's power.* "I will *avenge.*" God omnipotent can easily destroy or punish. God's providence and presence are sensibly felt among men. Hence the ruin of the wicked certain, irresistible, terrible, and complete.

The destruction of the kingdom. 1. *God is the Creator and Destroyer of nations.* Men build often upon weak foundations, with unsuitable materials, and for base designs. "Except the Lord build," &c. 2. *When God determines to destroy nations no power can avail against him.* "I will break the bow." No bow can abide in strength without him. Seeming prosperity or outward grandeur of no account with him. 3. *The destruction of nations is not always by outward force.* God has many ways, and can work without means. Loss in battle, invaded borders, and mercantile panics may be recovered. But vital corruption and decay of religion reach the very heart of a nation. Nothing can preserve a people wholly given to whoredom and idolatry. 4. *Destruction of national existence.* "If all the historians who recorded the ultimate extinction of nations were inspired of God to give the true reasons of their fall, we should often meet this testimony: "Perished of national pride, producing contempt of God and of fundamental morality!"' [*Cowles*].

Yet a little while. Space for repentance in human life and national affliction. Men perish not without warning. Judgment lingers long, but falls heavily at last. God's measurement of time disregarded and sinned away can never be given again. "I gave her space to repent of her fornication."

HOMILETICS.

Judgment and Mercy.—*Verses* 6, 7.

The second judgment, the punishment foretold in the name of the daughter, is greater than that of the first. God would scatter, now Israel will be unpitied. By reference to the opposite lot of Judah, all false hope in God's mercy is taken away. Those who forsake God, forsake their own mercy, and may reckon upon nothing but judgment.

I. Judgment without Mercy. Israel owed its preservation and prosperity amid anarchy and prevailing idolatry entirely to God's mercy. God long-suffering, but sinners may exhaust his patience. 1. *Mercy may be withheld from men.* When former mercies are received with ingratitude, or abused, God will add no more Ps. lix. 5). Goodness and mercy should lead to repentance, but if despised, men will treasure up wrath for themselves against the day of wrath (Rom. ii. 4, 5). Day by day, hour by hour, individuals may be heaping up this awful treasure. The cup may soon be filled, God's forbearance withheld, and judgment without mercy. 2. *Mercy withheld from men will lead to utter ruin.* "I will utterly take them away." The ten tribes never returned (except very few) from captivity. Judgment fell upon the Churches in Asia Minor, and now they are warnings to others. The long-suffering of God waited in vain in the days of Noah; the flood came and destroyed an ungodly world. Because sentence is not suddenly executed, men plunge into deep sin, ripen themselves for greater judgment, which comes in ten-fold vengeance and utterly takes them away. 3. *Mercy withheld from us and given to others is a sad ingredient in the cup of sorrow.* This life is often embittered by opposite lots. The sobriety of one condemns the drunkenness of another. The spendthrift sees in the happiness and prosperity of his neighbour what he might have been himself. There is a necessary and natural connection between conduct and reward here. So in the future; condition will result from character; the fruit will grow from the tree. "Say to the righteous, it shall be well with him. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him" (Is. iii. 10, 11). One thing is set against another to teach men righteousness. **II. Mercy in the midst of Judgment.** "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah." Mercy was wonderfully shown to Judah in her danger from Assyrians, in deliverance from Babylon, in her beaten and plundered condition at the present by Israel (2 Kings xiv. 12). This a type of God's dealings now. None deserve mercy, all are alike guilty. 1. *Mercy Divine in its source.* Israel had no mercy upon Judah; men have no mercy upon one another, but God shows mercy. "*I* will have mercy." 2. *Mercy sovereign in its objects.* Upon *Judah*, not Israel. God has mercy upon whom he will have mercy (Rom. ix. 15). Often sinners beyond all others, liars, thieves, and drunkards are chosen. Paul, Bunyan, and Newton become patterns of mercy unto others. In this there is no unrighteousness in God, nor injury to man. 3. *Mercy without human merit.* Man clings to means, and wants to be saved by works. Not by works of the law, lest man should boast, but entirely of grace, through faith. Human efforts, instrumentalities of men, the power of intellect, and the energy of will avail nothing. Not by bow nor by sword, not by horses and chariots, on which nations rely in battle. God needs no creature helps; exalted in power, he will magnify his grace. It is salvation complete, without sorrow, humiliation, and bloodshed. "By the Lord their God," whom they worshipped when Israel committed whoredom.

This passage leads us to contemplate God's mercy. Mercy is a modification of goodness. God is good to all, but is only merciful to the suffering sinner. Mercy not only implies suffering, but suffering arising from *sin*. If suffering were a necessity springing out of the constitution of things, its removal or mitigation would be an act of justice rather than mercy. Earth is a sphere where God shows his mercy, for here is suffering springing from sin. Here we have—

I. Mercy withheld from some. "For I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel," &c. When mercy has been abused the time comes when it is withheld, and the subjects are left abandoned of God. When mercy is withheld from nations they perish, from churches they decay, from families they sink to corruption, from individuals they are lost. "My spirit shall not always strive with men." II. Mercy bestowed upon others. "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah." This mercy was signally shown to Judah, when in one night one hundred and eighty-five thousand warriors were slain. Looking at the words in their spiritual application they suggest two remarks in relation to man's deliverance. First, *It is of mercy.* The deliverance of man from the guilt, the power, and consequence of sin, is entirely of God's mercy, free, sovereign, boundless mercy. Secondly, Man's deliverance is: *By moral means.* "Will not save them by bow," &c. No material force can deliver the soul from its spiritual difficulties and perils. Moral means alone

can effect the object. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord." Conclusion: Use mercy rightly while you have it. Its grand design is to produce reformation of character, and meetness for the high service and lofty fellowship with the great God, here and yonder, now and for ever [*The Homilist*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 7. *Mercy upon the house of Judah.* When Divine justice is glorified in some, yet there are others in whom free grace is glorified. And though some through unbelief are broken off, yet God will have a Church in this world till the end of time. It aggravates the rejection of Israel that God will have mercy on Judah, and not on them, and magnifies God's mercy to Judah, that though they also have done wickedly, yet God did not reject them as he rejected Israel [*Matt. Henry*].

The Lord their God. The antithesis is not merely to the false gods of the heathen, but to the conduct of Israel who cast off Jehovah. Hence God withheld mercy from Israel, but gave it to Judah, who owned him as *theirs*, and whom they outwardly worshipped in pursuance of the covenant with them. *Notice the benefits of national worship.* Even outward forms of worship and Sabbath observance remind us of the reality, tend to ameliorate the prejudices and intone the spirit of society. Men are in danger of sinking into animal life by the pressure of labour and materialism. Neglect of national worship would break down moral barriers, and flood the land with amusements and wickedness. The human race feel the necessity of a purer and better life. Hence whatever interferes with Sabbath observances, whatever hinders the worship of God and the moral culture of men, should be avoided. Without national worship—1. Many would observe no worship at all. 2. Men would have no opportunities for moral and religious instruction at all. 3. Generous feelings would not be cherished, the mutual equality of men in the sight of God would be forgotten, the highest ranks would not be inspired with humility and condescension, nor the lowest with feelings of gratitude and love. 4. The people would have no regard for God; eventually cast off all fear and restraint; and judgment without mercy would strip us of our national prestige and position. When utterly taken away no bow could defend us, and no battle save us.

HOMILETICS.

A CAST OFF PEOPLE.—*Verses* 8, 9.

The third judgment is the most severe of all. Lo-ammi, not my people. God ceases to compassionate the rebellious tribes, the state of rejection ensues, and they are no longer "my people," Jehovah will not belong to them. "I will not be your God." Notice the gradual steps to this result.

1. Fellowship with God is interrupted. God was the God of Israel, but they did not own him as such—did not worship him, but committed whoredom. The service of Jehovah was irksome. Idolatry weaned their hearts from him, and they neglected religious privileges and despised religious teaching. Neglect of public worship and private devotion, contempt for the ordinances of the gospel, any wilful interruptions of communion with God, are signs of declension and steps to utter abandonment of God. II. The Covenant relation is dissolved. Israel would not have God, and God would have nothing to do with them; would not be to them what he had been, and what they vainly expected he would be. They deprived themselves of his love and mercy, of his providence and protection. Many despise God and contemn his laws. They despise the authority of the Father, the death of the Son, and the influence of the Spirit. They disregard every office they sustain,

and dishonour every relation they bear to us. They break from their allegiance, and live alienated from God by wicked works. They are "without God in the world." To be without food and shelter is sad enough; to be without friends and supporters is sadder still; but to be without God, the sublimest being, the greatest good, is the real and awful condition of those whom God disowns. III. Utter rejection results. "Not my people." Forget God, and you will depart from him. Cast off God, and he will forsake you for ever (2 Chron. xv. 2). When God deserts in providence, and withholds his grace in Christ, men are doomed to be cut off from hope here, and eternal life hereafter. "I will not be your God," describe their dreadful condition; 1. Disowned, 2. Disinherited, and 3. Cursed.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Not be your God. 1. In the exigencies of life; to supply your need. 2. In the providences of life; to guide your steps. 3. In the end of life; at the solemn hour of death. Continuance in sin after once smiting will bring greater judgment upon nations, churches, and individuals. No limits must be set to God's mercy, yet it often happens when God contends with nations that they prove so obstinate in sin, so incessant in departing from God, that nothing but rejection ends it for a time. "The same is seen in individuals. God often first chastens them lightly, then more heavily, and brings them down in their iniquities; but if they still harden themselves, he withdraws both his chastisements and his grace, so that the sinner even prospers in this world, but, remaining finally impenitent, is cast off for ever" [*Pusey*].

The Three Judgments. 1. Three warnings to the impenitent. 2. Three opportunities of repentance. 3. Three degrees of chastisement—or, *The Judgments of God.* 1. Gradual in their manifestation. 2. Intenser in their degree. 3. Corrective in their design. 4. Suspended in their operations. 5. Certain in their event. 6. Destructive in their consequence.

A cast-off people. 1. Not a privileged people, do not belong to "the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise." 2. Not a pitied people, destitute of mercy and grace to help, exposed to wrath, and in danger of perishing. 3. Not a people at all, lacking everything which makes a people, spiritually dead. God's people the only real people, the only persons worthy to be called a people.

Ver. 4—10 may be taken as *A graphic picture of family life.* 1. The mother's life a life of apostasy from God. 2. The father's life a life of service for God. 3. The children's lives lives of judgments from God. What a difference in the moral character, spiritual condition, and future destiny in the same family.

HOMILETICS.

The Good Time coming.—*Verses* 10, 11; *ch.* ii. 1

Though excluded from the love of God, Israel was not always to be so. The hand which wounds will heal, and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. The spiritual Israel, the Gentiles as well as Jews, shall be restored to God and become numerous as the sand (Gen. xxxii. 12; Rom. ix. 25, 26). Light springs out of darkness, and life out of death. Promise of blessings follows threat of punishments, and a glorious future opens out to the penitent believer.

I. Israel shall be increased in number. 1. *This increase from God.* God the source of all increase in families, churches, and nations. Health, favourable circumstances, do not account for increase. Modern calculations must not be applied. God who multiplied Israel in Egypt by special miracle increases the

number of his people. "I will increase them with men like a flock." 2. *This increase is innumerable* "as the sand of the sea." It is a law of nature, a rule of providence, to promote growth from small beginnings. The oak from an acorn. A Syrian ready to perish became a great and populous nation, Deut. xxvi. 5. God's people, few in number at present, shall be increased to "a multitude which no man can number." "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; I the Lord will hasten it in his time." 3. *This increase notwithstanding persecution and sorrow.* God's people often severely persecuted and oppressed; their number diminished; but God replaces things temporal by things spiritual, outward gifts by inward graces, and restores fourfold what he takes away. The Church can never be crushed by force. Omnipotence defends her, and the purpose of God will never be frustrated. "Israel *shall* be as the sand," "it *shall* come to pass." **II. Israel shall be restored to spiritual dignity.** 1. *They shall be restored to right relation to God.* "The sons of the living God." This the goal of their Divine calling, but from this relation they had fallen. The external relation only a faint emblem of the spiritual. Not merely a people, but the people, the subjects, the *sons* of the living God. God owns his people, they are reconciled to him, and possess the spirit of adoption, whereby they say, Abba, Father. This is their unspeakable joy now, but is only a foretaste of what they shall be (1 John iii. 2). 2. *This restoration is by a method least expected.* "In the place where it was said, Ye are not my people," &c. Mercy when judgment is expected, love beyond description and degree. Love without a parallel and example. Love to the sinful, restoration to the fallen. The *place* of rejection, the place of redemption; in the place where there was nothing good and encouraging, *there* shall be a change for the better—a people shall be formed, increase given, and a nation gathered together under the benediction and protection of God. **III. Israel shall be united under one government.** "The children of Israel shall be gathered together and appoint themselves one head." 1. *United under one head.* This head not the pope, nor Zerubbabel as chief, nor Joshua as priest. Christ, the head of the Church, shall be the head of every man. He, "the one King, shall be the King to them all" (Ezek. xxxiv. 23). Men may gather together into societies and creeds, but no true unity, no real allegiance, except in Christ. He gathers together by his word and love the children of God which are scattered abroad (John xi. 52). 2. *United by Divine influence.* "They shall be gathered." God only knows where, and how, to find his people. He follows them in their wanderings, restores them when fallen, and leads them into green pastures, and beside the still waters. Men are drawn to Christ, disposed to join together, and made willing in the day of his power. 3. *United by voluntary consent.* We have first the act of God, without whom we can do nothing, and then follows their own act. "They appoint themselves one head." No outward force can constrain. If we do not act willingly, there can be no friendship and loyalty. God's service is a choice, a free service, "Choose you this day." "*Will* ye be my disciples?" 4. *United in true love.* "The children of Judah and the children of Israel," who lived apart and at enmity. In the gospel only we have a basis for a common brotherhood and fraternity; in Christ only have we bonds to cement and preserve it. In him Jew and Gentile, bond and free, live at peace; "no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms." "In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel" (Jer. iii. 18). "Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim" (Is. xi. 12, 13). 5. *United in great joy.* Taking ver. 1 in chap. ii. in connection with these, we have a declaration of joy. Those who called the children of the prophet not my people, and unfavoured, are now to call them the opposite names, the son to his brethren, the daughter to her sisters: or the people who have obtained mercy are summoned to salute one another with the new name and new dignity. Those who have obtained mercy

may rejoice, and rejoice in God. This privilege is insured to them. They must cherish mutual love among themselves, encourage one another in trouble, and rejoice together in hope. God's blessings must be commended to others. God's family is the only happy family. They "sing unto him a new song." 6. *United in great glory.* "They shall come up out of the land." They shall be delivered from captivity, and led into the land of promise; rise up and march forth to victory, and be re-instated in splendour and power. Egypt is a type of heathen lands into which Israel is driven; Canaan a type of the land of the Lord; the guidance of Israel through the wilderness, and their deliverance from captivity, a figurative representation of re-union with God, and restoration to full enjoyment of salvation. "Great shall be the day of Jezreel." This grand picture has not yet been realized; but under the leadership of the Messiah the destiny of the human race shall be accomplished. "This seed is now sown," says Matt. Henry, "in the earth and buried in the clods, but great shall be its day when the harvest comes." Look joyfully, pray continually, and labour earnestly for that day when God shall sow and give the full increase of the Redeemer's work (John xii. 24).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 10. *Places of sorrow, places of joy.* Where the fathers are cast off for unbelief, the children shall there be restored in mercy—places of death, places of resurrection.

The living God. "The world has abounded with dead gods; there is but one *living* God. He is the living one. He is life, the primal fount of all existence. Christ calls him the living Father. As the living Father sent me, I live in the Father, so he that eateth with me shall live by me" [*Dr Thomas*]. If we expect God to be a living God to us, it becomes us not to have dead hearts in his service. If God be active for our good, let us be active for his honour [*Burroughs*].

Sons of the living God. 1. A unique relation. 2. A distinguished privilege. 3. A blessed prospect.

One Head, ver. 11. Saints are said to appoint Christ their head, and indeed to set the crown upon his head (Cant. iii. 11), when they choose him and embrace him for their sovereign, when with highest estimations, most vigorous affections, and utmost endeavours of unfeigned obedience, they set him up in their hearts, and serve him in their lives [*Trapp*].

The Headship of Christ is: 1. The fulfilment of ancient prophecy. 2. The bond of connection with God. 3. The unity of all ranks. 4. The centre and support of all virtues. He is King of the Jews, Head of the human race, and Lord of all creation. When mankind depart from God, they lose the bond of unity and of peace. They are divided then into parties, which contend with and exterminate each other. But when these have again united themselves with the Lord, the unity of the members is restored. Therefore there is liberty, equality, and fraternity only in the Lord [*Lange*].

Great days of the Church. The Sabbath—the resurrection of Christ—the day of Pentecost—the day of revivals, and the gathering together of all nations.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Our Age and Work, ver. 1. Every great man is the son of his age, but not its pupil [*Guesses at Truth*]. The dream, the common mistake, of the present day, is the belief that a man cannot be useful and noble without great endowments and a grand sphere. If we had great opportunities, and great duties, we could do something in life, and make a mark after death. The littleness of our trust is often an excuse for its neglect, like the servant with one pound who hid his Lord's money. But with moderate powers, in a small sphere,

we may be faithful to duty, and secure our reward. We must live and act in the present; realize what God has given us to do *to-day*, and do not look beyond it. "David after he had served *his own* generation, by the will of God, fell on sleep."

Mother's conduct. "I am a missionary in my nursery," once observed a Christian mother. "Six pair of little eyes are daily watching mamma's looks, and listening to her words, and I wish my children never to see in me that which they may not imitate." "The mother lives again," says Smiles, "in her children. They unconsciously mould themselves after her manner, her speech, her conduct, and her method of life. Her habits become theirs, and her character is visibly repeated in them."

Retribution, ver. 4, 5. That God is revealed in nature as a God of retribution, the writings of the heathen abundantly show. The attribute of retributive justice they made a separate deity, whose conclusions and awards would be full and perfect only in the future world. They gathered this, *first*, from the admonitions of conscience within them; *second*, from those judgments of God, from time to time falling upon mortals, so extreme and awful, that even the most darkened minds were compelled to interpret them as God's testimony, both of his wrath against sin, and his determination to punish it. But by far the most remarkable of these judgments are related in the Scriptures; and the sacred writer adds to the enumeration of them, that they happened as examples, and are to be regarded as proving this great truth, that God is reserving the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished. God's judgments awaken men's conscience and set it powerfully at work. They reveal a God who can and will punish sin [*Cheever*].

Judgment and Mercy, ver. 6—9. The changes of providence are not the tricks of fortune. Empires rise and fall at God's bidding. A dungeon here, and there a throne, his will assigns. Assyria yields to Babylon, and Babylon to the Medes. Kings are but puppets in his hand; they serve his purpose when they rise and when they fall. A certain author [Timbs] has issued a work called "Historic Ninepins," a fit name of scorn for all the great ones of the earth. God only is: all power belongs to him; all else is shadow, coming and going, unsubstantial, misty, dream-like [*Spurgeon*].

> Here he exalts neglected worms
> To sceptres and a crown;
> Anon the following page he turns
> And treads the monarch down.

Mercy. In the reign of the first Napoleon, there was an insurrection at Paris. One of the ring-leaders was brought before the Emperor; and as this was his second offence against the government, he was sentenced to be transported. The day after the trial, it was told Napoleon that the child of the convicted man was waiting to see him. "Bring her in," said Napoleon; and a tearful, trembling little girl, on being led in, cast herself at his feet and implored him to have mercy on her father. "My child," said the emperor, touched by her distress, "this is the second time your father has been guilty of treason; I cannot save him." "Oh, sir!" said the kneeling child, "it is not *justice* we want, but *mercy* and *pardon*." Napoleon, much moved, raised the girl to her feet, and said, "For your sake I will release your father." We deserve judgment, but our great want from the Lord our God is mercy. "I will have mercy" [*American Paper*].

Free as the sun that shineth, and gilds the mountain's brow, and makes glad the valleys, without fee or reward, so free is the mercy of God to every needy sinner. Free as the air which belts the earth, and penetrates the peasant's cottage, as well as the royal palace, without purchase or premium, so free is the mercy of God in Christ. It tarrieth not for thee; it cometh to thee as thou art. It waylayeth thee in love: it meeteth thee in tenderness [*Spurgeon*].

Forsaken, ver. 8, 9. To be forsaken of God implies utter loneliness, utter helplessness, utter friendlessness, utter

hopelessness, and unutterable agony [*Spurgeon*].

Future increase, ver. 10, 11. Prophecy predicts a bright and blessed future. Everything in the conditions of the human mind and of universal society indicates a coming change, a glorious transformation. The nations are looking and yearning for their redemption. The world must be subject to Christ. Every knee must bow to him, and every tongue confess that he is Lord. His name is the only perfect symbol of freedom and life. Under his love and reign every fetter of mind shall be broken; the heart shall be purified, social happiness will be diffused, order and harmony will be restored, and the whole race be again bound in one grand unity. Heaven will be reflected on earth, and earth will be wedded to heaven. God shall descend and dwell with men, and men shall become the sons, and rise into the life of God.

CHAPTER II.

Critical Notes.—2. Plead] Jehovah makes the demand, urges individual Israelites to reason with the *mother*, i. e. the nation viewed as one. The children were seduced, in danger of punishment, and as penitents must protest against her conduct. **Wife**] Forfeited all claims to my protection. **Sight**] Lit. from her face, the seat of modesty and shame (Jer. iii. 8; vi. 15). "The eyes are windows through which death, i. e. lawless desire, enters into the soul, and takes it captive" [*Pusey*]. **3. Strip**] Nudity, the ancient punishment of an adulteress (Ezek. xvi. 37). **Set**] Lit. fix her as a gazing-stock, in a state of helplessness and misery. **Wilderness**] Reduced to want; an outward type of inward distress (Jer. ii. 6). **4. Children**] inherit the nature, and exposed to the judgment, of their mother. Many imagine because free from the guilt and stain of sin they will not share its punishment. **5. Done shamefully**] Heb. to practise shame (2 Sam. xix. 5). "She made shameful everything which she could make shameful—her acts, her children, and herself" [*Pusey*]. The reproach of the mother should rouse the sons from spiritual apathy. **Lovers**] Idols and idolatrous nations whose alliance they courted, and to whom they ascribed the gifts of life, bread and water (Jer. xliv. 17); a picture of life estranged from God. **6. Hedge and make**] Build *a wall*, a double enclosure of stones and thorns. In the East cattle are fenced with thorns and closes. God with determined purpose will interpose between Israel and her idols. **Behold, I will hedge**] Exile and distress, and the inability of her gods to help, would prove the folly of her conduct (Job xix. 18; Lam. iii. 7—9). **7. Follow after and seek**] In eager pursuit and diligent search. "They express together a pursuit, whose minuteness is not hindered by its vehemence, nor its extent and wideness by its exactness. She shall seek far and wide, minutely and carefully, everywhere and in all things, and shall fail in all" [*Pusey*]. **Not find**] deliverance from calamity. **8. Not know**] Wilful ignorance and ingratitude, for she was taught by the law and the providence of God. **Prepared**] Made and mended images of Baal, and devoted them to the support and extension of idolatry. **9. Return**] As if absent from men when they abuse his gifts: turn from love to displeasure; from bestowing bounties to withholding them. **Recover**] Because "*I*" emphatic, the giver not acknowledged. **Nakedness**] The result of gifts withheld. **Take away**] by dearth and unfruitful seasons, vermin, judgments, &c. **10. Discover her lewdness**] Lit. uncover her shame. Sin decked out in gaudy colours, and covered with showy masks, shall be stripped and exposed to public shame. *None* can avert the threatened punishment. **11. Feast days**] and festivals retained in worship should cease because abused. **12. Vines and fig-trees**] Esteemed *rewards*, wages of prostitution (Deut. xxiii. 19; Isa. xxiii. 17); the choicest produce of earth, denoting sustenance and prosperity, would be destroyed by Assyria (ch. ix. 4, 5). **14. Therefore**] Nevertheless a promise of conversion (ver. 14—17); and assurance of renewed covenant (ver. 18—23). Misery draws mercy. **Allure**] in a friendly sense; decoy by words, persuade by love. God outbids the idols and displays his attractive grace. **Wilderness**] The way from Egypt to Canaan a type of temporal want and distress, needful discipline, and miraculous deliverance. Solitude leads to enjoyment and fellowship with God. **Speak comfortably**] Lit. to her heart in friendly feeling; to mitigate her grief and heal her wounds. **15. Achor**] Where Achan troubled Israel (Josh. vii. 11—15); the borders of Canaan and the place of cleansing and success. **A door of hope**] Hope dawned in despair, and sorrow turned into joy. **Sing**] When God speaks comfortably the Church responds gratefully, like Israel at the Red Sea (Ex. xv.; cf.

times; the re-established Jews at friends with the heathen nations. **Bow**] War extinguished, and its instruments destroyed (Ps. xlvi. 9; Ezek. xxxix. 9, 10). **19. Betroth**] Make a new covenant with Jew and Gentile; three times repeated. God not only forgives, but espouses afresh and for ever. **In right**] In justice to himself and his law; by purifying from sin (Is. i. 27). **In judgment**] Vindicating his cause, and showing right from wrong. **20. In faithfulness**] (Ps. cxi. 9; John xiii. 1.) **Shalt know**] experimentally and be saved; the consequence of the union, not mere acknowledgment of God, but a taste of his love. **21. I will hear**] The heavens pray to God, to give to earth its fertility; the earth and all creatures desire to satisfy the wants of God's people; God is no longer scattering, but providing and planting. **22 Jez.** =] the seed of God. **23. Will sow**] A promise antithetic to the threat (Deut. xxviii. 23; Lev. xxvi. 19); expressive of prodigious converts and innumerable blessings on the earth (Rom. xi. 12—15). The children now change names to show mercy and prove restoration. "And with tenderness I will cherish her that had been *Lo-Ruhamah* (the not-beloved), and I will say to *Lo-Ammi* (to the no-people-of-mine), *Ammi* (my own people) art thou; and he shall say, *My God*" [*Horsley*].

This chapter is an enlargement and application of the first, the symbol of the one is expounded by the other. The sinful conduct of the nation is condemned, punishment is threatened, but salvation is proclaimed in promise of restitution and the blessings of peace and subsistence. The remnant among Israel, for whose sake God preserved a corrupt people, must prove living witnesses for him, testify to his goodness and grace, and urge others to turn to Jehovah. The penitent must plead with the impenitent, the converted with the unconverted, and the children with the parents.

HOMILETICS.

Filial Expostulation.—*Verses* 1—5.

The mother is the representative of the nation, of the ungodly in all nations and families. The sons must plead with them. They are involved in judgments, left orphans, and without protection, by the conduct of their mother.

I. Charge her with dissolution of the Marriage Contract. "She is not my wife." A spiritual union was formed between God and his people, under terms of great endearment and oneness. But she was no longer united to God by faith and love, and God would own her no longer. Churches and individuals who give themselves to God must not decline in love. This will forfeit the honour, the protection of God, and his covenant relation; provoke him to anger, and lead to divorcement. How touching is the rebuke uttered by the complaint, Thou no longer lovest me! "She is not my wife, I am not her husband!" The history of the Church is a sad commentary upon these words. The Church at Ephesus was not wanting in purity of doctrine, nor in severity of discipline. The Lord disclosed the heart and published the fault. "Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." **II. Urge her to put away Sin.** The idolatry is described as whoredom and adultery; a breach of fidelity which Israel owed to God; an act of apostasy from God; more culpable than heathenish idolatry and superstitions. 1. *A public sin.* Israel, like a barefaced harlot, displayed her sins in public before men. Publicity tempts the weak, taints the innocent, and leads to ruin. Wickedness like this is the most dissolute, and its woe will be the most intense. Some sin secretly, but others proclaim their sin to the world—they glory in their shame. 2. *A shameful sin.* The face and the breasts are those parts of the body which display want of chastity, and depict boldness and shamelessness. Many neither shame nor blush at their vice. Boldness without confession of wrong, wickedness done with desire of recognition, impudence in sin, will lead to hardness of heart. Those who will not blush will soon be unable to blush. "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall." **III. Warn her of Danger.** Sin always involves risk, and brings its consequences upon ourselves and others. Every one is in duty bound, in his house, among his friends and relations, and in his country, to labour for the happiness and good of all, to check the wickedness and ward off the dangers by which he is surrounded. 1. *She will expose herself.* "Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born," &c. (*a*) *Expose herself to nakedness and helplessness.* Israel taken when weak and

few in number; trained, fed, and clothed by God like a little child; married to God, and adorned as a bride; should now be stripped, deprived of every ornament, as an adulterous wife; of all temporal and spiritual blessings as a people; and left naked and helpless, a gazing-stock to others. When God ceases to care and provide for a people, withholds the gifts of nature and of grace, they will become defiled by sin, cast out and loathsome. Like Adam and Eve, they will lose their innocence, and learn their nakedness. Divine judgments strip men of natural defence, family honour, and leave them "naked unto their shame amongst their enemies" (Ex. xxii. 25). (*b*) *Expose herself to want and distress.* "Make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land." Incursions and hostilities of the enemy could lay her waste as a wilderness; or put her in great straits and distress, as in the desert when they came out of Egypt. Idolatry desolates the land and brings the devouring sword. She would be like a dry land, destitute of food and the maintenance of life. Well-watered gardens become deserts through sin. The outward is a type of the inward. "Mind hath its deserts no less than Region," says Bacon. "Everything that I love," said Napoleon, "everything that belongs to *me*, is stricken. Heaven and mankind unite to afflict me." The soul of the sinner is desolate and unfruitful in the ways and works of God; devoid of God's presence and blessing; unrelieved by green pastures and living rills. "Your house is left unto you desolate," are words which describe the doom of all without Christ. Hungry and thirsty, they are not satisfied, but perish like a traveller in want. "Slay her with thirst." 2. *She would endanger her children.* "I will not have mercy upon her children"—children of whoredom inheriting the nature and suffering from the conduct of their mother. There is no security in sin. The rising generation do not escape. Parents entail a curse upon their offspring, and individuals are involved in national calamities. As good is diffused on every hand, so evil has its consequences; consequences which have their influences, results themselves pregnant with other results, in endless succession. Our endeavour should be to guard ourselves from the evil of others, and guard against detriment from our own acts. "This man perished not alone in his iniquity." **IV. Reprove her for Folly.** She had acted shamefully in word and deed, towards herself and her children. The course of sin is a course of shame. The sinner forgets his best friend, and forsakes his own mercy. "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" The conduct of Israel was an affront to God and a reproach to man. To fall down to any image, ancient or modern, is to turn our glory into shame. This was—1. *An ungrateful sin.* God set before them his law and judgments, promised blessings for obedience, and had given them the necessities and the luxuries of life; "more than corn, wine, and oil" (Ps. iv. 7); but they claimed these gifts as their own; "*my* bread and *my* water;" or ascribed them to the lovers they followed. Men care for the things of time and sense, lands, houses, and life, and forget the claims, the prior right of God. These things are only lent us, must not be held upon wrong tenure and made our gods. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." 2. *An aggravated sin.* Amid Divine chastisement Israel encouraged herself in idolatry. She called the objects of her choice "lovers," and drew others to follow her in pursuit. She waits not for invitation and allurement, but eager and unbidden, contrary to natural feeling and covenant pledge, she cries, "I will go." She was obstinate in pursuit, and avowed her determination. Abuse is added to ingratitude; God is forsaken for the pleasures of life, and men attribute present happiness and prosperity to sin, rather than to his goodness and forbearance. Take heed lest ye be fattened and fitted for slaughter. Aggravated sin ripens for judgment. He that despises God's reproof "shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." 3. *A delusive sin.* Idols do not give the necessities and enjoyments of life. God alone can fill men's "hearts with food and gladness" (Acts xiv. 17). The heathens had a goddess of corn and gods of wine from whom they expected these gifts; so

men now make their gods, and fancy that these gods will help them. They delude themselves by error and folly; make things outside of God their lovers; and deify their talents or the laws of nature. We belong to God, and all things are at his disposal. If we do not trust in him, we "observe lying vanities." Man must have a god, and if he will not love and serve the true and living God, he makes a fool of himself, and pays homage to a lie and a delusion. "As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1 may be taken as (in last chapter), 1. *A declaration of joy.* Wrath passed away and mercy remembered. 2. *A declaration of Christian experience.* (*a*) To encourage others. (*b*) To glorify God. God's grace is magnified; God's word is proved to be faithful; God's name made known, and others are induced to repent and trust in him. "Say ye to your brethren, Ammi." 3. *An exhortation to the converted to plead with the unconverted.* The few faithful in faithless Israel must plead with others. Those who know God must expostulate with those who do not know him; children with parents; relatives with relatives. (*a*) *This a natural order.* We naturally feel for friends and relatives. We may not forget others, but we *begin* at home. Andrew was acquainted with Jesus and related to Peter. "He first findeth his own brother Simon." Paul could wish himself accursed for his kindred in the flesh (Rom. ix. 3). (*b*) *This a Divine order.* "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee" (Mark v. 19). "Let them (children) learn first to show piety at home" (1 Tim. v. 4). (*c*) *This the most successful order.* We have greater sympathy for friends, more love to our own, than others. They are more likely to be influenced and persuaded by us than others. "Plead with your mother, plead" earnestly, faithfully, and continually.

Ver. 3. *The folly of sin.* 1. It strips men of blessings. 2. Exposes them to shame and danger. 3. Leaves them helpless and distressed. The sinner is naked; bereft of grace, love, and protection; and exposed to famine and peril. A Christian Church which throws off the ornaments of Divine grace and Divine ordinances will be stripped of outward privileges—spiritual gifts despised will lead to withdrawal of temporal gifts.[1]

Ver. 4. Mercy withheld from children, churches, or nations, is a sad addition to their trouble. There is nothing to moderate, prevent, or remove their sorrow.

Ver. 5. "*I will go.*" *The infatuation of the sinner*, who hardens, emboldens himself in sin, and rushes, heedless of warnings and judgments, to shame and destruction. *Steps in apostasy from God.* 1. Renouncing obedience. 2. Loving idols. 3. Ascribing God's gifts to idols. 4. Justifying this course from benefits received. "We too have our idols, which our natural hearts madly run after, turning away from God. Whatever we make our chief good, outside of God, is an idol. How apt, moreover, we are to take God's gifts, our food, clothing, comforts, and luxuries, as if they were our own by some peculiar right; calling them '*my* bread, *my* water, *my* wool, *my* flax,' and to attribute our possession of them to our gold, our industry, and our talents, making these our gods" [*Fausset's Com.*]. God is the real giver of all temporal and spiritual blessings. If, therefore, thou hast any want, seek its supply from God [*Lange*].[2]

[1] "Sin is a wasting plague to souls, countries, and enjoyments, for so is imported in the words, and 'make her as a wilderness,'" &c. [*Hutcheson*].

[2] "As it is a great sin to depart from God and his true worship, so especially is it a shameful way of departing from him when men's ends are so low and base that they will follow any way of religion for interest and advantage, and account the thriving way best. Israel thought she throve best in trade because of her idolatry, 'they give me my bread,'" &c. [*Hutcheson*].

HOMILETICS.

The Unsuccessful Pursuit.—*Verses* 6, 7.

Though Israel is dishonoured and fallen, she is not left to herself. God's mercy yearns over and seeks to check her in sin and recall her to himself. God even now has not written a bill of divorcement, nor cast away the people whom he did foreknow. Through eighteen hundred years they have been wandering without a dwelling-place and a temple; but the day will come, when she will "no more be termed Forsaken," nor "the land be termed Desolate; but she will be called Hephzi-bah and the land Beulah." Men are prone to wander. They are disappointed in their wanderings, and God rouses, instructs, and restores his backsliding people.

I. A pursuit after wrong objects. Man is a creature of strong affections. His feelings cling round the objects of his choice like ivy round a tree. Through sin these affections are misplaced. He loves the things which he should hate, and hates the things which he should love; forsakes the true God, and pursues lovers of his own. He must love, he will worship, something; "that I may win" is the desire of every soul. Wealth, honour, position, and learning are eagerly sought, loved for their own sake and for the sake of what they are thought to give. Thus men are seeking happiness where it cannot be found; committing two evils, forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns which will hold no water. "Who will show us any good?" is the cry of the many. "Lord, lift thou upon us the light of thy countenance," is the prayer of the few. **II. A pursuit with intense anxiety.** Man's spiritual desires are insatiable, yet ever seek gratification. They forbid him to rest, and compel him to seek supply. Inward sense of want, incapacity for alliance with sin, and instinctive longing for God, the "first good, first perfect, and first fair"—of whom all created beauty and good are mere shadows—make men restless and discontented. But instead of lifting the soul to God, they look to the creature for satisfaction; "*seek*" and "*follow after*" in eager pursuit of what they love; labour harder in sin, and seeking pleasure, than in serving God. They weary themselves in pursuit, rendered more eager by thorn-hedges and hindrances. Vexation and disappointment excite to desperate tenacity; affliction and remorse are often no check to the sinner; fuel is added to the fire, and with renewed ardour onward he goes to ruin and despair. "I *will* go after my lovers." The impenitent struggle on after that which God is taking from them, and will not give up, until the pursuit is found hopeless and exhaustive, and God in preserving mercy brings him back. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" **III. A pursuit under Divine restraint.** God governs the world, and seeks the good of his creatures. The way of transgressors is rendered hard "through much tribulation." It is a warfare against conscience, reason, and revelation. In consciousness of guilt we may discern our relationship to God. The trouble and anguish of spirit springing from this consciousness, "the inward unrest which sometimes seizes the slave of sin are proofs that he has not quite broken away from God." God works within by his Spirit and without by his providences. Hedges and walls are fixed up to restrain men in sin. 1. *The restraints of God's providence are various in their nature.* God sought to cut off Israel from idolatry by solitude and affliction. Like a thorn-hedge, affliction is painful. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous." Conscience, the Divine officer, warns and checks the sinner. Disappointments in pursuits, pains attending pleasures, Divine judgments, and special manifestations, turn men from their purpose. Saul was overcome by light from heaven; Balaam was met by an angel, and David by Abigail (1 Sam. xxv. 32). 2. *The restraints of God's providence are merciful in their design,* "that she shall not find her paths." (*a*) *Given to withdraw men from*

sinful pursuits. "She shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them." (*b*) *Given to restore men to God.* "Then shall she say, I will go and return." Strong barriers and painful providences are not sufficient. If God did not mercifully interfere we should all go astray. Let us repent of sin, be thankful for correction, and admire the wondrous grace of God. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." **IV. A pursuit ending in failure.** "She shall not overtake" what she follows; "she shall not find" what she seeks. Failure and disappointment after all her eagerness and effort! Egypt and Assyria were trusted in vain. Worldly alliances were of no service; did not give the anticipated deliverance. Idols were impotent; foreign nations were a broken reed, a source of sorrow and bitterness of spirit. Israel was obliged to confess, "*it was better with me than now.*" The sinner gains nothing, but loses everything, by forsaking God. He pursues phantoms of bliss. The pursuit will disgust, and end in failure. "Why did the cannon-balls spare me to die in this manner? I am no longer the Great Napoleon. How fallen and disappointed I am!" cried Napoleon in his latter end. Nothing can take the place of God—nothing can satisfy but bread. A sinful life can never give peace of conscience and peace with God. The beast may be satisfied with what it finds on earth, for its nature aspires no higher; but man is linked to God, longs for him, and cannot be contented without him. Though the heart once alienated from him turns further away, and moves not towards him until renewed, yet even in its wandering it retains its nature and necessities. God is its centre, and it is restless and void till it meets with him again. Men go here and there, do this and that, in quest of good, as moments dictate and circumstances call forth, but all in vain. They faint in mind and fail in hope. God never created man to find rest and happiness in utter rejection of himself. "Thou madest us for thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in thee" [*Augustine*]. "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

The Backslider's Way hedged up.—*Verses* 5—7.

Consider the text, and seek to arouse and restore backsliders, who have left their first love, and may have forsaken the Church of God, given up their profession and all attendance upon Divine worship.

I. While sinful men are in prosperity they pervert the mercies of God to their own injury, making them instruments of sin and weapons of warfare against God. While Israel enjoyed abundance of temporal comforts they ascribed all these blessings to false gods. Prosperous sinners make three great mistakes. At the outset *they give their temporal mercies the first place in their hearts.* Business prospers, but they consider not their soul. They say, "*We must live,*" but they forget that *they must die.* Such folly most shameful, base ingratitude, in one who has known, or professed to have known, better. One error leads to another, and hence such people *hold their temporal things upon a wrong tenure.* Observe how many times the word "my" is found in the text. "Give me *my* bread," &c. They were not hers, but God's, who expressly claims them, and threatens to take them all away (*verse* 9). The backslider once professed himself to be God's servant; nothing is his now—houses, lands, profits, and children, only lent for a season. He is but God's under-bailiff, possesses only as tenant-at-will, or as a borrower, holding a loan. Then, further, backsliders *are apt to ascribe their prosperity and their mercies to their sins.* I have even heard one say, "Ever since I gave up a profession of religion I have made more headway in business than I did before." Some apostates have boasted, "Since I broke through puritanical restraint, and went out into worldly company, I have been better in spirits, and better in purse than ever I was before." Thus

they ascribe the mercies which God has given them to their sins, and wickedly bow down to their lusts, as Israel did before the golden calf, and cry, "These be thy gods, O Israel!" These things are given to try you, to see how far you will go, and to what extravagances of ingratitude you will descend. **II. Turn from the gloomy side, and observe that the Lord interposes adversity in order to bring back his wandering children.** Consider the hindrances which a God of love puts in the way. You see *an unexpected hindrance*, for it is placed right in the man's way. "I will hedge up thy way"—it was his *way*, his *habit;* he had fallen into it, and he meant to keep on; but suddenly he met with an unlooked-for obstacle. This hedge is placed in your way in different shapes. Business grows slack; bad debts multiply; bankruptcy stares you in the face; and where you had enough to lavish on pleasure you have not enough to supply your need. You thought you would live a millionnaire; more likely now to die a pauper. Or sudden sickness falls upon a strong healthy person. Possibly the hedge is of other thorns. The first-born son, the expected heir, the joy of the father's heart, falls like a withered flower; his wife is cut off as a lily snapped from its stalk. These are walls across the way of those whom God ordains to bless. Observe, it has a *very disappointing impediment.* The prosperous sinner is stopped when securely pursuing his way. "Why," says the man, "if it had not been for that I should have made a fortune." "Why did death come just when my fair girl looked so lovely, and when my dear boy had grown so engaging? Ah! this is trouble indeed. To meet with misfortune just when I built that new house, and held my head so high, and expected to see my daughters so respectably married; this is very disappointing." The man kicks, and though once professed to be a child of God, he is ready to curse God and die. If he knew the Divine nature, he would thank God for his troubles on bended knees. What *painful* hindrances our heavenly Father often uses. He hedges the sinner's path, not with rhododendrons and azaleas, not with roses and laurels, but with thorns—prickly thorns, which curse the soil and tear the flesh, are God's instruments of restraint. Furthermore, the fence *is effectual:* if the thorn hedge will not suffice, it is written, "I will make a wall." Some are so desperate in sin that they break through ordinary restraints; then a wall shall be tried, through which there is no breaking, over which there is no climbing. **III. You would think that the sinner would now stop, but instead of that, according to the text, even though God walls up the way of sin, men will try to follow it, but this resolve shall be in vain.** He is desperately set on destruction, as though it were to be desired. What a creature is man, though he knows that sin will be his ruin, yet he hugs it as though it were his chief mercy; heaps to himself destruction as though it were gold. If the righteous were half as intent in seeking after goodness as the wicked are in hunting sin, how much more active would they be. Truly this love is so strange, that if we did not see it in ourselves we should wonder at it. It is *in you*, Christians, as in the worst of men, and but for Divine mercy you would have plunged on from bad to worse. **IV. Consider that the backslider's failure is followed by a blessed result.** Observe, here is repentance *attended with sorrow.* The poor creature deeply feels to the very soul the wretchedness of her condition. It is an *active repentance.* It is not merely "I will return," but, "I will go and return." There is much earnestness in a sinner seeking Christ; but more, if possible, in a backslider returning from the error of his ways; for he has not only the guilt of sin to mourn over, but the double guilt of having despised the Saviour, of having known the way of righteousness and turned from it. *The confession* which this poor soul makes of folly *is one which is sustained by the best of reasons.* "Then was it better with me than now." Backslider, what have you gained? Have you gained anything more comfortable than *the light of your Father's face?* Before, you had the privilege of going to the throne of grace, *you could tell your wants before God, and spread your sorrows there;* but now you have no throne of grace

to go to. Then *you had* God's *promises* to *fall back upon*. Once *you had communion with Christ*. What can the world afford you comparable to this? There is no room to entertain a comparison for a moment. Lastly, this repentance was *acceptable*. It is not often that a husband is willing to take back his wife when she has so grossly sinned, as the metaphor here implies; yet God is willing to receive the sinner, though his sin is even more aggravated. "Return unto me, for I am married unto thee." **V. Observe that there is an awful contrast to all this.** Some prosper until, like a wide-spread tree, they are cut down and cast into the fire. There are backsliders who, never having had the root of the matter in them, go back unto their own ways and continue there for ever. Never trifle with backsliding. Chosen vessels, notwithstanding their backslidings, are brought back; but, ah! remember that nine out of ten of those who backslide never were God's people. You must be born again, and only the man who continues to the end shall be saved. **VI. We conclude with this—is not this subject a very solemn warning to the people of God?** If one man falls, another may. If one professor turns out to be a hypocrite, another may. There must be the continual keeping and anointing of the Holy Spirit. No man backslides at once. Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together. Wake up your coldness in private prayer. If love to Christ has grown cold, pray to the Master to inflame your heart again. Let us trust the Saviour. There is the sinner's hope; there is the saint's strength [*Spurgeon*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 6. Subject:—*Divine Restraints.* I. These restraints are *manifold.* "I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall." The first metaphor is from a husbandman who plants a prickly hedge to prevent cattle from breaking away. The other from architecture. If thorns are insufficient, high and massive walls must be built. 1. There is the restraint of *affliction.* When the wicked purpose some great crime, affliction comes, breaks their plans, and strikes them down. 2. There is the restraint of *public sentiment.* Public opinion, as it gets enlightened and strong, is a tremendous check to the wicked. The most daring cower before the public voice. 3. There is the restraint of *conscience.* Conscience is a Divine officer holding the sinner.

II. These restraints are *necessary.* It is necessary that God should plant thorny hedges and build massive walls around the sinner. 1. It is necessary for the *sinner himself.* Were it not for these he would go galloping to perdition. "O, unhappy men," says Luther, "when God leaves them to themselves, and does not resist them in their lusts. You bless yourselves many times that in the way of sin you find no difficulty. Bless thyself! Thou hast cause to howl and wring thy hands, thou hast the curse of God on thee. A dreadful curse to make pleasant the way of sin." 2. It is necessary for the *world.* What would become of the world if the wicked were not reined in? Were it not for restraints the Cæsars, the Alexanders, and the Napoleons would soon turn it into a Pandemonium. 3. It is necessary for the *Church.* Had wicked men their full fling, how long would the Church last? The flames of martyrdom would soon blaze to heaven and consume Zion to ashes. Thank God for thorny hedges and massive walls, for all the restraints he puts on sinful men [*The Homilist*].

The Danger of outward Prosperity—sufferings a specific against apostasy.

Divine Chastisements. 1. Love, their source. 2. Sorrow, their means. 3. Good, their end. "Crosses and obstacles in an evil course are a great blessing, and are so to be accounted. They are God's hedges, to keep us from transgressing, to restrain us from wandering out of the green pastures, *to withdraw man from his purpose* (Job xxxiii. 17), to make the way of sin difficult, that we may not go on in it, and to keep us

from it whether we will or not. We have reason to bless God both for restraining grace and for restraining providences" [*Matt. Henry*].

Ver. 7. The Course of Sin. 1. A course of labour — unrequited toil — vexation of spirit and bitter bondage. Sinners labour harder than saints, and receive nothing but exhaustion and fatigue. 2. A course of failure. Loss of health and peace—all loss and no gain. 3. The service of God the only true gain. "It was better with me." Godliness is profitable to all things—body and soul, this world and the next. Sin suicidal. God's service real advantage. Those who embrace God, would take him up as the best of choices, and his way as the shortest cut to do well and to be well: they are sensible of their own disadvantage in forsaking him: for so much is imported as the reason for her return, "for then was it better with me than now" [*Hutcheson*].

I will go and return. 1. The sinner's wandering. 2. The sinner's penitence. 3. The sinner's return to God. "By this text we may gather what true repentance is: namely, when a sinner not only confesseth himself guilty and worthy of punishment, but truly displeaseth himself and seriously returns to God. Here we have two essential parts of true repentance—namely, contrition and conversion; or humiliation and reformation. The former is called in Scripture repentance for sin, the latter repentance from sin: and the one without the other is to no purpose or profit" [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

God Dishonoured in His Gifts to Men.—*Verses* 8, 9.

Israel is still accused and threatened. God will disgust the idolatrous nation, put to shame its delusive fancy that all prosperity came from idols, and bring it to an acknowledgment of dependence upon him. In gross and affected ignorance she fathered all gifts upon her gods.

Here we have—I. The Gifts of Life bestowed in abundance. Israel was greatly blessed with "corn, and wine, and oil," the fruits of the land. These productions were the foundation of the nation's wealth and prosperity, and the means by which "silver and gold" were multiplied. Money was superabundant in Solomon's reign. "The king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones" (1 Kings x. 27). Wool and flax for clothing and ornament. God bestows necessities and luxuries upon men; honour and position, leaders and genius, upon nations. The earth yields its increase, and corn and wine, bread and water, are spread before us in the wilderness. The sun sheds forth its light and heat, flowers send forth fragrance, and herbs grow for man and beast. All our possessions and enjoyments come from him. Amid ingratitude, atheism, and vice, life springs up ever new, food is given as plentifully to sustain it, and joy and blessings are poured over all existence. God "is kind unto the unthankful and the evil." He makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. II. The Gifts of Life received with ingratitude. "She did not know." She would not know. It was not a mere weakness or infirmity, but wilful ignorance. God had taught her by Moses and the prophets. In their feasts and offerings of first-fruits, in their eventful history and the wonders of providence, the goodness of God was impressed upon their minds. But when the heart is not touched, the memory will fail. The ingratitude of man to man is base. Pitt was soured in temper by the ingratitude which he experienced. "All the peers whom he had made deserted him," says a writer, "and half of those whom he had served returned his kindness by going over to his enemies." Divine favours are frozen by human ingratitude and turned into a cause of rebellion. There was no excuse for Israel, and none for men now. 1. *Ignorant of the Divine source from whence they come.* "*I* gave her corn." "God is the giver of every good and perfect gift." "A man can

receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." But men do not acknowledge God; attribute their comforts to secondary causes, their own skill, their fellow-men, or "good luck." The *ox* knows its owner, and the *ass* his master's crib, and both are grateful for help: but intelligent beings receive gifts from God, and hoard up for posterity; forget their relation, and pay no dues to their benefactor; but live in known sin and wilful disregard of his love. What tables are spread for us without grace before meat or gratitude after. 2. *Ignorant of the benevolent purpose for which they are sent.* Grass for cattle, corn and wine to gladden human hearts, flax and wool to clothe and beautify human bodies, and all things richly to enjoy. God has never left "himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." But we claim his bounties as our own, forget the end for which they are bestowed, and under a formal and false religion, employ them for selfish and unworthy ends. "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" **III. The Gifts of Life basely abused.** Israel first made golden calves, then mended or made images of Baal with the gold and silver which God had given them. God's gifts were turned into human idols, worshipped by men's own hands, and turned into food for sinful lusts. In modern idolatry God's blessings are abused and employed to maintain and spread the worship of Baal and Bacchus. Gold and silver, houses and land, children and earthly comforts, take the place of God; all are taken as our special right, attributed to our intellect and industry, and employed in the service of idolatry. In providence God is displaced by fortune or fate; in business talent and tact is all; in pursuit of pleasure and gain, the heart and understanding, the soul and body, are wholly devoted to unworthy objects. "Covetousness is idolatry." Men are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." Christians are cautioned against "the worship of angels," and of some it is said "their god is their belly." Self-will, excessive thirst of aggrandizement, love of applause, undue veneration of creatures, greedy indulgence in lust and animal appetite, and inordinate attachments of every kind, are dishonouring to God and injurious to man, prove a tendency to depart from God, and display the actual and continual forgetting of God's claims, who says to each individual person, "I am the Lord thy God." "Thou shalt have no other god before *me*." **IV. The Gifts of Life justly withheld.** "Therefore will I return and take away my corn." These things were God's, not theirs—they were only stewards in trust. He reserves all power to himself, and retains supreme authority over men. If they do not give him his due, unjustly withhold their gratitude and homage, then he will claim his own and take from them what he bestowed for their welfare. God is the sole proprietor, has incontestable right, and to him we must give an account. 1. *Gifts abused will be taken away from men.* Ingratitude and sinful appropriation will rob us of enjoyments and necessities of life. Idleness and neglect will forfeit all reward. Take from him that which he hath (Luke viii. 18; xix. 24, 26). Keeping, hiding our talents, and non-employment of our time will bring—(*a*) Divine denunciation, (*b*) Divine deprivation, and (*c*) Divine displeasure. 2. *Gifts abused will be taken away from men unexpectedly.* "In the time thereof," and "in the season thereof." Just when they expect them and when men think they are sure of them. God will blast the harvest when it is ready for reaping. The meat shall be taken from their mouths (Joel i. 16); drunkards will awake and weep (ver. 5, 11); and husbandmen howl. In the fulness of sufficiency men are put into straits (Job xx. 22, 23); and when they are just about to realize their hopes they will be disappointed. Unseasonable weather, wicked men, and mysterious providences *snatch* away abused mercies. This punishment is more signal and severe than gradual decay or long-looked for visitation. It is not the work of chance, but a solemn, significant judgment of God which leaves the sinner in want and distress, in shame and utter destitution.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 8. *Ignorance of God.* 1. Negative, inexcusable. 2. Affected, sinful. 3. Wilful, hopeless. "There remaineth no sacrifice if we sin wilfully," &c.

Ingratitude. 1. Its source, wilful ignorance. 2. Its fruit, (*a*) forgetfulness of Divine benefits, (*b*) worship of idols — coarse and refined. 3. Its punishment, withdrawal of all gifts, resulting in poverty and distress. "Were men but sensible of what God doth for them every day and hour, they could not in equity and common ingenuity serve him as they do. He preserveth and provideth for us all; lays us down and takes us up, commanding the best of creatures to cater for us (Hos. ii. 21), and to bring us in the best of best for our subsistence (Ps. viii.). Every good gift and perfect, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, cometh from the Father of lights (Jas. i. 17), as naturally and as constantly as light doth from the sun, or water from the sea. Let us therefore imitate those lights of heaven and rivers of earth, do all the good we can with those good things, corn, wine, silver and gold, &c., which God hath given us, and then reflect back towards and return all the glory and praise unto the sun of our righteousness and the sea of our salvation. Let us ever send back (as the beams of the moon and stars return to the face of the sun, which gave them their beauty) to God's own glorious self the honour of all his gifts, by a fruitful improvement of them and fresh songs of praise" [*Trapp*]. God manifests great kindness, whereof little notice is taken, and wherein his hand is not seen nor acknowledged [*Hutcheson*].

When men will not know God as the giver of all their temporal blessings, they shall be compelled to know him as the withholder of them [*Fausset*]. Those who abuse the mercies God gives them to his dishonour, cannot expect to enjoy them long [*Matt. Henry*].

HOMILETICS.

The Exposure of Folly.—*Verse* 10.

Warning follows warning, but amid judgment and corruption Israel forgets God and gives up herself to mirth and idolatry. Pleasures allure men astray. But sin and mirth will be separated, and those who refuse Divine mercy will feel Divine justice.

Notice:—I. **Folly decked in gaudy colours.** "Lewdness" means folly; for sin is real folly, as holiness is essential wisdom. Foolishness is the natural tendency, the mighty propensity to evil; bound up in the heart, incorporated in the thoughts, and manifest in the life of the sinner. But the folly of sin is often veiled in darkness, decked in ornament and trickery, to attract and deceive. It dazzles by its glitter and ensnares by its mask. The outside is attractive, but the inside is deceptive. There is no substance, no enjoyment in sin; all is shadow and emptiness. Men think themselves wise in their folly, and are praised for their worldly policy (Ps. xlix. 18). They call themselves happy, when applauded by others and blessed with temporal prosperity. But fame and success, wealth and worldly possessions, are impotent in the tomb. The dying worldling "shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him." The pleasures of sin and the pride of life are only rainbow colours to the bubble, giving it tint, but no substance and reality. There is no utility, no rest, no gain in sin. It is not a casual step from the path of wisdom, but the regular and usual course of folly. Essential folly, folly in the grain, folly in its nature, folly in its dress, and folly in its end. "Nought but itself could be its parallel." It has the fascination and the fangs of a serpent. "It biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." It deceives and destroys. In whatever guise folly presents itself, gross and repellent, subtle and seductive, it must be shunned. "Abstain from all appearance of evil," or as some, "from everything that not only is evil, but that looks like evil." II. **Folly ex-**

posed to public shame. "Now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers." Darkness and secresy are no hiding-place to God. His eyes penetrate every place, and his hand can reach every person. Secret sins shall be discovered and their perpetrators exposed. The mask shall be torn away, and sin in its nature and consequences shall appear offensive, lewd, "exceeding sinful." Men may deny the fact and excuse the fault of sin; may cover crime with lies, and self-righteousness with professional virtues; but a God of truth will bring "to light the hidden things of darkness." Virtues are hidden and oppressed; wickedness rules; and every day cries out for redress and retribution. Evil-doers shun the light and love darkness. They never will, never did, appreciate the light of holiness and rectitude. It reveals their folly and kindles remorse in their bosom. As foul birds of night, they hide themselves from its beams. The wicked cover their sins from themselves and others. They banish serious thoughts from their minds, stifle convictions, and put on a cheerful appearance. But "he that covereth his sins shall not prosper." An offended God, who summoned Adam from his hiding-place, will call and condemn the sinner. In public, "*in the sight of her lovers*," before men on earth and angels in eternity, they will be put to shame and confusion of face. The darkest deeds are "set in the light of God's countenance," and will "be proclaimed upon the house-tops." "There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." **III. Folly bereft of every defence.** "None shall deliver her out of mine hand." When God begins to work, who shall let or hinder him? Men say, "It was an oversight," "I could not help it," therefore forget it. They plead ignorance, custom, temptation, infirmity, necessity, and fatalism even, to excuse or palliate their guilt. This will never succeed. It was hopeless for Israel to trust to their idols and alliances. The strongest army, the most popular idol, are nothing before God. "All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity." The allurements of vice will deceive. Reliance on temporal prosperity, outward formality, and religious ceremony will be in vain. It is only faith in Christ, not confidence in men, that can deliver us. The wicked "strengtheneth himself in his wickedness" (Ps. lii. 7); but he can neither outwit nor overcome his Judge. Given to wickedness, the sinner and the false professor shall find that "*none shall deliver*." "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness" (Prov. xiv. 32); "neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it" (Eccl. viii. 8).

MIRTH TURNED INTO MOURNING.—*Verse* 11.

Israel had forsaken the temple of God, and worshipped idols under the form of a calf—had changed some festivals, and kept up all in outward form. The monthly and yearly feasts were celebrated with mirth. God had commanded them to rejoice in their feasts (Deut. xvi. 14); but their hymns and instrumental music, their priests and sacrifices, were licentiousness and falsehood, luxury and excess of every description and degree. Their joy must cease and their mirth would be turned into mourning.

I. Mirth connected with wickedness. 1. *It is a most prevalent connection.* "The notes of jollity and fun are heard everywhere through society. At theatres, taverns, divans, and social festivities, it flares and rattles. The drunkard has his mirth, the liar his mirth, the debaucher his mirth, the blasphemer his mirth, the sabbath-breaker his mirth. The union of sin and mirth is, alas, very common. "We meet it everywhere; in the dance and in the song, in the joke and in the gibe" [*Dr Thomas*]. 2. *It is a most unreasonable connection.* Wickedness and mirth, how incongruous! "Sorrow is better than laughter" to the wicked. "For by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." The condition and prospects of a sinner should make him weep rather than rejoice. Sin can never give true happiness. The world can never be our home, and the heart cannot rest

there. Its resources are poor; its pleasures are not solid; and when its "joys are all packed up and gone," then will be the days of mourning. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness. **II. Mirth connected with false religion.** If sin and mirth are unreasonable, how much more mirth and idolatry! Israel turned "her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths" into days of making merry. On the Sabbath they should have owned God as their Creator; on other festive days they should have thanked him for the gifts of Nature and the wonders of Providence. But the worship of God was blended with the service of idols; and feigned joy under the form of true joy. As Israel of old "made a calf in Horeb," the place of solemnities and law: so men now worship "graven images;" cling to forms of their own device; and change true joy into false mirth. Joy becomes a feast; but the revelry that marked heathen festivals can never become the house of God. Communion with God can never be enjoyed through consecrated symbols. "Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." **III. Mirth turned into mourning.** Their songs were to cease, and their music and dancing turned into weeping and wailing. "I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation" (Amos viii. 10). The mirthful songs of sinners suddenly change into shrieks of agony and death. Many a sigh is heard amid loudest laughter. The smiles of mirth are counterfeits to hide hearts of woe. Belshazzar's impious feast to a thousand lords ended by his own destruction and that of his empire. "Be merry and wise." "Fly the pleasure which bites to-morrow." Mirth pursued, possessed, and enjoyed without God is vanity (Ecc. vii. 6). 1. *It is of short duration.* It is but "the crackling of thorns under a pot," a blaze for a moment, an excitement which cannot last. 2. *It is certain in its termination. I* "will cause her mirth to cease." It may be attractive in its appearance, supported by its resources, and spread by its devotees; but the solemn warning is read, "Woe unto you that laugh now; for ye shall mourn and weep."

PROSPERITY TURNED INTO ADVERSITY.—*Verses* 12, 13.

Festive rejoicing was to end. Israel loved new moons and sabbath days not for the sake of religious worship, but for sinful pleasures and delight. The vine and fig-tree, the choicest productions of the land, and the source of great wealth and sustenance, were to be taken away. Orchards, gardens, and vineyards were to be neglected, deprived of defences, and exposed to wild beasts.

I. Prosperity in rich abundance. God is the Giver. There is no moment in all history, in all departments of life, in which he is not giving with a liberal and powerful hand. He is the author of abundance everywhere—abundant light, abundant rain, and abundant joys. Israel had a land flowing with milk and honey. The necessities and luxuries of life are given to men in abundance. Giving doth not impoverish him, nor withholding make him rich. But even to those who abuse his gifts, to the wicked and unthankful, God bestows prosperity. The ungodly prosper on earth. They are successful in business. Their bread seems to be gained without care, and their wines without stint. They are often in great power, ruling with the might of Cæsar and the wealth of Crœsus. "Spreading themselves like a green bay tree," they are rooted in the world, add house to house, and field to field, rise higher and higher in splendour and pride. "They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." They escape many anxious cares and killing toil. God's people smart under the rod while the wicked escape. But to the eye of faith and in the sanctuary of God these perplexities are unriddled. "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious at the prosperity of the wicked." **II. Prosperity greatly abused.** 1. *Ascribed to wrong sources.* A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven; but he looks to sinful and secondary

causes, and boasts as if he had received nothing. Israel thought all their prosperity was bestowed by their idols. "These are my rewards that my lovers have given me." Men look to their neighbours, or thank their stars, for their good fortune. They attribute success in business to their diligence and talent; believe themselves to be the architects of their own fortunes; and cry in the spirit of Nebuchadnezzar, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built," &c. 2. *Leading to sinful practices.* "Wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels." Like harlots, the Israelites adorned themselves to attract admirers and like heathens, they burned incense to idol gods. One sin leads to another Prosperity begets pride, and pride begets ingratitude. Then when God is deserted, his power, goodness, and love are attributed to another; sacrifices are offered and incense burned to unworthy deities. Ancient and modern idolatry have filled the world with corrupt practices and tendencies. Impurity, unchastity of every description, is most deteriorating. In dishonouring God, men have "dishonoured their own bodies" (Rom. i. 24). Moral corruption is followed by physical debasement. The grossness of Pagan idolatry is only equalled by the degrading immoralities which it fostered and consecrated. Gluttony, drunkenness, and every "sin without the body," only injures, does not alienate the body from God: "but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body," commits sacrilege, and makes it like a harlot's body (1 Cor. vi. 18, 19). **III. Prosperity visited by Divine judgment.** "I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees." What God gives he can easily take away—turn our joy into mourning—our prosperity into adversity. 1. *Temporal judgment.* Before, God had threatened only to take away the fruits in their season; now he will take away not only fruit, but the trees that bare it. Present enjoyments and future prospects can be cut off; beauty, wealth, and honour wither like a flower; famine and sword can turn our vineyards into a desert. "He smote their vines also and their fig-trees; and brake the trees of their coast." 2. *Spiritual judgment.* "I will *visit* upon her the days of Baalim." Take one step to idolatry, we may be given up to more. God may seem to wink for a time, but a continual course of impenitence will be visited with severe punishment. Change Jehovah for Baal, you change prosperity for adversity, honour for shame, real enjoyment for sensual pleasure. God's presence is seen and God's voice is heard in all the vicissitudes of men. Woe to men when their table becomes a snare, "and that which should have been for their welfare a trap," a retribution for their departure from God, and their inhumanity to themselves (Ps. lxix. 22).

Restoration to God.—*Verses* 14—16.

"*Therefore,*" a treatment not as we should expect, not after the manner of men, but according to Divine mercy. This is not an inference from the 13th verse, but from the whole section. Because Israel had been punished severely for sin and forgetfulness of God; because reduced to distress and longing to return to God—I will go and return, ver. 7—"therefore" God allures and restores the sinner to himself.

I. The nature of restoration to God. 1. *From bondage to liberty.* Israel in Egypt, under severe, helpless, degrading servitude, a type of the sinner under the dominion, authority, and consequence of sin. Heavy tribute, cruel taskmasters, unrequited toil, render life bitter and distressing. Sin makes the sinner serve with rigour and sigh for freedom. Israel redeemed and led into the wilderness a type of separation from sin and restoration to God. An entire separation to devote oneself to God (Ex. v. 3). 2. *From darkness to light.* Egypt not only a place of bondage, but of darkness. Sin is moral darkness. The valley of Achor is a place of Divine chastisement and suffering. Sin brings trouble, penitence bursts the clouds and brings hope. Put away the accursed thing: God will show mercy. The sinner when restored is turned from the darkness of ignorance and doubt, fear and despair, to the light of truth and joy, from the power of Satan unto God

(Acts xxvi. 18). **II. The method of restoration to God.** 1. *By Divine attraction from without.* God seeks to counteract the effects of sin by showing its exceeding sinfulness; to allure to virtue by displaying its beauty; to persuade men by the preaching of the gospel. God in Christ is placable. Hard thoughts of God are sinful. Truth is beautiful, and the promises are encouraging. Though deep and fixed dislike be rooted in the heart, yet "*God is love.*" This is the special revelation, the grand fact of the gospel. It is the expression of God's love to me—"He hath loved me." This Divine truth imparts new ideas to the mind, and stays the progress of the sinner, like that of Saul in his departure from God. 2. *By Divine operation within.* "And speak comfortably unto her." The truth of God alone is not sufficient. The Spirit must enlighten the mind and work in the heart. The ear may be touched, but the soul not comforted. When truth is near it does not attract, nor kindle sympathy in the heart. Men know the truth, but do not practise it. God, Christ, and moral virtue do not attract. The Spirit renews the disposition and begets love; makes us willing, and draws us with the cords of a man and bands of love. God speaks friendly, and draws effectually when he writes his laws in our hearts (2 Cor. iii. 10). **III. The results of restoration to God.** God does not speak in vain. As in the first creation he spake and it was done, so in the second his will is obeyed. "I will draw all men unto me." 1. *Response for reluctance.* The sinner is unwilling to return; the penitent fears and hesitates; but when God said, "Seek ye my face," my heart said unto thee, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Where other voices fail God's voice is effectual. There is a true response, a prompt and ready response. The inmost soul is moved, and, like the echo among the Alps, repeats the notes of Divine music. There is no delay nor denial, for this savours of distrust, and displeases God. There is full and complete, hearty and sincere return. The resolution is no sooner made, "I will go," than carried out. The heart is in tune with God, and sings for joy, like Israel in her days f youth and deliverance. Israel at the Red Sea was a young and joyful nation, redeemed from bondage and ready to sacrifice. "I will sing unto the Lord" (Ex. xv.). Man never rises to his dignity until he realizes his relation to God. Then he utters emotions in songs of praise, and music becomes the handmaid of memory and the instrument of praise. 2. *Riches for poverty.* "I will give her vineyards from thence." The wilderness had no supply of bread and water, no fertile plains and fruitful fields. It yielded nothing, yet Israel lacked nothing. Water gushed out from the rock, and manna fell from the clouds. The sinner is in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; barren and unfruitful in heart and life; poor in spirit and prospect, in a wretched and forlorn condition, "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." But when restored to God, he is rich in experience and life, spiritual joy and hope, rich in faith and rich in God. 3. *Sonship for slavery.* "Thou shalt call me Ishi, and shalt call me no more Baali." Baal indicated lordship, and was a name given to idols. God would disown the title, lest his people should be reminded of their former condition—preferred the tender name of love to prove closer relationship. "Thy Maker (thy Baal) is thy husband." God would have Israel forsake everything which kept up the reputation and put them in mind of idolatry. He was married again to them. The Church calls him by right names when in true relation. The sinner when restored to Divine favour, the son when introduced into the family of God, is not under the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption by which he cries, Abba, Father. God is not cold towards us; be not lukewarm towards him. "Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 14. "*I will allure her,*" *&c.* The attractions of Divine love. 1. They are innumerable, yet so frequently overlooked. 2. They are powerful, yet

so frequently resisted. 3. Rich in blessing, yet so frequently unemployed. "Christ works upon his people *fortiter*, but yet *suaviter;* powerfully, but yet sweetly; he inclineth their hearts to his testimonies, and not to covetousness (Ps. cxix. 36), and brings them to the obedience of faith. If he do seduce them it is for no hurt, it is but to speak a word in private to them, as one friend may with another; it is but to give them his loves, as he speaks in the Canticles; to show them his glory, as he did Moses; to spread before them his beauty, and so to catch them by guile as St Paul did the Corinthians (2 Epist. xii. 16); to steal away their hearts before they are aware, according to that, Cant. vi. 12, that they thenceforth may be an Aminadab, a willing people, a free-hearted people (Ps. cx. 3), waiting for the law (Isa. xlii. 4), and walking by the rule (Gal. vi. 16)" [*Trapp*].

The valley of Achor. 1. An assertion of God's rights. 2. A warning to sinners (cf. Jos. vii. 25, 26).

A door of Hope. 1. Trouble turned into joy. 2. Judgment turned into mercy. 3. Despair turned into hope.

Up out of the land of Egypt. Moral life an elevation in character, purpose, and pursuit; an advancement towards God and heaven. "Such as are converted to Christ, should resolve on a journey and progress, as having more before them of duty and exercise and enjoyments; for after she is 'allured,' Israel is to remove and come to a wilderness, whether we understand it of the progress of the godly toward heaven, or toward wonted enjoyments" [*Hutcheson.*]

Vineyards from thence. Observe the *Author* of these favours. *I* will do it. Every good gift is from God; and his people acknowledge that all they enjoy is not only from his agency, but from his grace. Observe also the *richness of the supplies.* I will give her, not her corn, which is for necessity, but grapes, which are for delight. Yea, it is not a vine but a vineyard; yea, vineyards! As if he could not do too much for them, he engages to give; concerned not only for their safety, but welfare; not only for their relief, but enjoyment; not only for their tasting consolation, but being filled with joy and peace in believing. Observe also the *strangeness of the way* in which these indulgences are to be communicated. *Whence* are these supplies to come? From a *wilderness.* Loneliness and mazes, danger and beasts of prey, sand, and briers, and thorns only in a wilderness. "He only doeth wondrous things;" turns the shadow of death into morning, makes rivers in high places and streams in the desert. He makes the wilderness to rejoice and blossom as the rose, and gives us vineyards from *thence.*

Earth is a wilderness. It was not designed to be such, but sin entered into the world, cursed the ground, and the Fall left it such. Such it would be now but for Divine grace. Men of the world are discontented and miserable, to the Christian the curse is turned into a blessing. He has before him a land of promise, a thousand succours and delights, and in Divine ordinances he has comforts, vineyards from thence. *Solitude* is a wilderness. There is much to be done, gained, and enjoyed alone. There we gain our best knowledge and richest experience; enjoy the freedom of prayer and intercourse with God. *Outward trouble* is a wilderness. Many afraid to be brought into it, but God has given them vineyards from thence. What proofs of God's presence in trouble! What discoveries and supports! As the sufferings of Christ have abounded, so the consolations have also abounded by Christ. *The state of mind produced by conviction of sin.* A wounded spirit, who can bear? Who does not remember the surprise, the confusion of mind, the terror, the anguish, and self-despair he once felt? and who can forget the feelings induced by a discovery of the cross and the joy of God's salvation? Many are afraid when their friends tremble at God's word and are broken in heart. Christians hail it as a token for good, and know that he gave *them their* vineyards from thence. The same may be said of *self-abasement*, and *distress of soul*, which a believer may feel, when he sees his unworthi-

ness, depravity, and guilt. The experience is lamentable, but will not hurt him. He giveth grace unto the humble. The *valley of the shadow of death* is the last wilderness. There is much to render it awful and uninviting, but when entered the gloom flies away. The place has been made glad for those subject to its bondage and fear. They have had a peaceful and delightful entrance into the joy of their Lord. And what vineyards does he give them from *thence!* [*Jay*].

Ver. 15. *A revived Church.* 1. The frequent condition of the Church. In the land of Egypt; in bondage to sin, to sense, and to materialism. 2. The means of revival. "I will allure—speak comfortably—and give her vineyards." 3. The results of revival. "Youth," and renewed vigour. "Sing," joy, and rejoicing. God's presence restored his ancient people from literal captivity, and his spiritual seed from sorrow and distress. "God's dealings with his people will furnish them with joy and refreshment; 'she shall sing.' Not only should they rejoice when all things are performed according to promise, but when the Lord gives any pledge of his love, or begun evidences of it, they ought to cherish it by joy and praise, though full fruition be wanting: for even '*there*' on the border of her wilderness, in the valley of Achor" [*Hutcheson*].

HOMILETICS.

The Good Time Coming.—*Verses* 17—20.

When the cry of trouble is turned into the song of joy, and nations cease to worship idols and serve the true God, then God restores them to his favour, and renews to them his covenant. Idolatry shall cease, and perfect peace—peace with God, peace among men, and peace with the beasts of the field—shall follow. God predicts a memorable time to be enjoyed by men.

I. **Abolition of idolatry.** "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered." God abhors idolatry, and warns his people against its evils (Ex. xxiii. 13; Deut. xii. 3). God's name must be remembered, and his worship be upheld by his word and grace. People must not devote themselves to any false god. The non-existence of other gods must be recognized—they are nonentities. "Thou shalt have no other gods." The Church shall be purified from error and false worship. Heathen nations shall abandon their gods many and lords many—shall neglect their offerings, and close their pagodas and temples. At the present time, at home and abroad, the signs are cheering; but "in that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats." 1. *This abolition is by Divine agency.* "*I* will take away the names of Baalim." Atheism, Polytheism, and superstitions of every kind can only be abolished by Divine power. Education, civilization, and commerce cannot renew the heart and reform the habits of people. Our hearts are sinful, prejudices and heathen customs are deeply rooted, and the Gospel alone can renew and deliver. 2. *This abolition is seen in the purity of language.* The names shall be taken "out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name." The names detested and disowned shall be disused. There must be no mixture in life or lip of idolatry and true religion. God's name must not be desecrated and Baal's name be reverenced. "Call me no more Baali." God's grace in the heart purifies the language of the lip. "I will turn to the people a pure language." The liar speaks the truth, the swearer forsakes his oaths, and the penitent separates himself from every pollution of word and deed. A Christian spirit governs the tongue, selects the holiest themes in conversation, and clothes the fittest words with impressive forms. "No corrupt speech" proceeds out of the mouth of a true believer. His conversation is neither corrupt nor insipid, but hallowed with pungency to excite interest

and preserved with flavour to influence for good. A man's tongue is an index to his life ; a test of his godliness. "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom." **II. Cessation of war.** "I will break the bow and the sword, and the battle out of the earth." Warriors and warlike statesmen have been too long the idols and too much the gods of mankind. Alexander and Napoleon have been extolled : but military fame is delusive and false ; war is inhuman and criminal. Science and philosophy, legislation and commercial treaties, may mitigate, but cannot prevent or abolish it. Nations often defy these, and armies are not checked by paper or parchment. This is to act like the Xerxes of morality, and throw our idle chains into the tempestuous ocean of strife. Morality and religion forbid war. Christianity, in its principles and obligations, produces peace. Christ the Prince of Peace shall break the bow and the sword ; establish the government of peace and good will towards men—spiritual foes are already despoiled of their power to hurt and destroy. The goodness of the cause is certain, though its success for a time be doubtful. God has spoken the word, and it shall come to pass. "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks : nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." In this belief the Christian may rejoice. Many are asking, "Shall the sword devour for ever?" and others, whatever be their differences in opinion, cry in practice, "I am for peace." **III. Security from wild beasts.** "In that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field." When man was subject and loyal to his Maker, all creatures were subject to him. When he rebelled, the harmony of creation was broken, and peace with inferior creatures destroyed. Man is still lord of creation ; but nature is an unwilling servant, and must be restrained and subjugated by force. Man's fear over beasts of the earth has gradually diminished, and the enmity between the tame and wild, between the friendly innocence and the hostile dread of the species has gradually increased. This lost dominion will be regained in Christ. Though no longer ruling by the sympathy of a spiritual power, yet he is legally authorized to exercise forcible dominion over three classes most injurious to him (Gen. ix. 2). Though nothing in the sight of the starry universe, and "a little lower than the angels," yet all things will be put under his feet. In the mean time God protects the dwellings and the fields of man. Savage beasts are under his control, linked into Divine covenant, and made man's servants. Prowling creatures of the field, ravenous fowls of the air, and creeping scorpions of the earth, are prevented from touching men. "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder," not accidentally, but intentionally, in power and conquest. "I have an impression," says Dr Thomas, "that were man to possess and manifest the moral majesty of goodness, the wildest and most savage creatures would stand in awe of him." God shall replace the sceptre in man's hand. The promise to Israel was, "I will cause the evil beast to cease out of the land"—the promise to us is, 'The beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee." **IV. Perfect peace and tranquillity.** "And will make them to lie safely." Man is not secure, is not at peace with all creation, yet. Beasts may devour and war destroy him. Dangers threaten, above, below, and all around him. God only can protect him and make him dwell securely. But outward peace can neither give nor destroy inward confidence and rest. God keeps from fear and alarms by night and by day, and makes us "take our rest in safety" (Job xi. 18). Short-lived is the rest, insecure is the safety, of the wicked ; but the righteous "lie down safely," in confidence and calm repose. He is fearless and courageous, for only "perfect love casteth out fear." He is often at peace with his neighbours, and always at peace with his conscience and God. As a loving parent puts to rest and watches over her darling babe, so God sends to sleep and keeps in rest his own children. This rest is only a foretaste of everlasting rest, unfading peace in Christ. Tenures differ, but nothing can equal the safety which the believer has in his covenant God. By special promise his security is fixed, and by special presence his safety is secured. What would some men give for a good night's rest ! They

are tossed about by troublous thoughts, waking at every stir, and unsettled in every place. "When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet." **V. Covenant blessings renewed.** "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever." God promises to restore Israel and treat her as a spotless virgin. In a threefold repetition he declares his love to the unfaithful and unworthy. He forgets the past, forgives sin, and espouses afresh, and that for ever. There is no divorce for adultery. He only is unchangeable, and his mercy, grace, and goodness abound to the chief of sinners. It is mercy to bring back, but love beyond degree to betroth and endow with bridal gifts. Notice—1. *The method of the engagement.* "God betroths his Church to himself in righteousness and judgment, not by doing her justice, and faithfully fulfilling the obligations which he undertook at the conclusion of the covenant, but by purifying her, through the medium of just judgment, from all the uncleanness and ungodliness that adhere to her still (Is. i. 27), that he may wipe out everything that can injure the covenant on the part of the Church. But with the existing sinfulness of human nature, justice and judgment will not suffice to secure the lasting continuance of the covenant; and therefore God also promises to show mercy and compassion. But even the love and compassion of God have their limits; the Lord still further adds, "in faithfulness or constancy," and thereby gives the promise that he will no more withdraw his mercy from her" [*Keil*]. The covenant is founded upon a firm basis — "in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies." In the faithfulness of God the pledge is sure; God will keep his covenant for ever (Ps. cxi. 9). 2. *The result of the engagement.* "Thou shalt know the Lord." The complaint was that Israel did not know God, nor recognize his providence in the blessings of life (ver. 8). The consequence of this union would be a real and experimental knowledge of God; not intellectually merely, but living, personal relation to him. Many *acknowledge* God, but do not know him. True knowledge includes love and life. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." When restored to God, we know him not merely as God, as revealed in his word, but what he is to us, as our God in Christ. We discover more of his grace and love, enjoy more of his favour, and we love God because he first loved us.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 17. That which is very innocent in itself should, when it has been abused in idolatry, be abolished, and the very use of it taken away, that nothing may be done to keep idols in remembrance, much less to keep them in reputation.

To remember with delight sins past is to re-commit them; and herein the deceitful heart is with all care to be looked unto, that when we call to mind former evil practices, though with an intent to be humbled for them, we be not insnared and drawn to commit them afresh by being tickled in the thought of them [*Trapp*].

Ver. 18. The blessings of God do not correspond only, they go beyond the punishment. The protection is complete. Every kind of animal, beast, bird, and reptile is named. Together the words express that God would withhold the power from all enemies, visible or invisible; worldly or spiritual. Each also may denote some separate form of the enemy [*Pusey*].

God foretells much more the greatness of what he would do for man, than the little which man receives. The gospel brings peace within, and since wars and fightings come from evil passions and lust, it brings peace as far as it prevails without also; peace, as the borders of the Church (Ps. cxlvii. 14); peace in the world, so far as it is won to Christ by the Church; peace to the soul of the believer, so far as he loves God and obeys the gospel [*Pusey*].

Ver. 19, 20. In the covenant of grace, there is God's part and there is

our part. But God undertakes for the latter as well as the former—engages to do all that is necessary *for* his people and *in* them. Here is the *nature* of the connection he will establish with them. "I will *betroth* thee unto me." And the *manner* of it. In *righteousness*, &c. 1. In *righteousness*. He is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works The soul that sinneth shall die. Righteousness, then, seems to require the punishment of the sinner. The awakened soul wants to see how God can be just and the justifier. He has provided for this in the gospel. Though sin is pardoned, yet it is condemned. The transgressor escapes, but the curse falls upon another. The law is magnified and honoured in Christ. In the destruction of sinners justice would have been displayed passively, but now actively—would have been hated, but now loved by them. For righteousness means not only the way in which the guilty are made just, but the depraved holy. This is from the same gracious agency, and equally necessary with the former; for God could not admit men into communion with himself in a state of sin. "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" 2. In *judgment*. The heathens placed Mercury, the god of wisdom, by the side of Venus, the goddess of marriage; and for good reason, for there is nothing in which judgment is so needful. Hence the wretched consequences of hasty matches. But God knows what he does and why he does it—has reasons which justify the measure of his infinite understanding, and salvation is called his counsel. This is true in contriving, procuring, and applying it. The place, time, and manner of conversion known to him. We know but little now, yet there are openings which carry the mind in contemplation and surprise, and which assure us more remains for our discovery and rapture in the world of light. This applies also to God's people as well as to God himself. In their choice of him and love to him wisdom is seen. The world may censure, but they can give a reason of the hope within them. The spiritual judgeth all things, though he himself is judged of no man. 3. In *loving-kindness*. Without this persons had better never come together — it is daily and mutually needed. The law of kindness should rule in looks, words, and actions. This seldom wanting in the female, often in the male side. Hence men commanded to love their wives. God says to his Church, "You shall find me full of tenderness and compassion," &c. Strange to apply the exercise of this quality to *them* as well as to him, yet he has sanctioned it. "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth," &c. He takes at their hand everything they do for him; their disposition makes them afraid to grieve his Holy Spirit, and anxious to walk "worthy of him unto all pleasing." 4. In *mercies*. This is distinguishable from the former. *That* was the effect, *this* shows the cause, and mentioned in addition to loving-kindness, to remind us that all we possess, or expect, springs from the free, undeserved grace of God, and to meet discouragement from a sense of unworthiness and ill-deservings. God will not cast away his people, but have mercy upon them according to the *multitude* of his *tender* mercies. The more cheerful and vigorous will they be, the more they remember this truth. Fruits that grow in the sun are richer and riper than those which grow in the shade. The best frame we can be in is to be upheld by a free spirit, and act under a full sense of our Divine privileges. Let us therefore sing of God's mercy for ever, and if he *seems* to have forgotten to be gracious, plead and say, "Where is thy zeal, and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies toward me?" Here again is imported, not only that we receive, but exercise mercy, not towards him personally, but towards his creatures that need it. What is done to them he considers as done to himself. What so just and proper as that they who are forgiven should forgive? And they which live by mercy should be merciful? [*Jay*].

I will betroth thee unto me for ever. Christians are not only pardoned, but employed in God's service—not only reconciled, but admitted into friendship

and intimacy. Yea, they are not only friends and favourites, but his bride. Observe *the permanency of the relation.* "Permanency adds bliss to bliss." Every enjoyment and possession is impaired in value without it. The more important any acquisition, the more necessary to our happiness, the more alive we are to keep it; the more averse to its absence, the more painful the loss. Yet whatever we are attached to here, we set our hearts on that which is not. Jews are said always to throw a glass on the ground in their nuptial ceremony, to indicate that the union formed was brittle as glass. The apostle reminds us that time is short, and that they who have wives will be as though they had none. We take each other "till death do us part"—the relation *is* terminated by the death of *either*. But Christians can never be in a widowed state—never lose their defence, glory, and joy. Nothing is precarious in the transactions of God with his people. "I know that whatsoever God doeth it shall be for ever," &c. How delightful in a world of changes to know that *he* changeth not, and therefore we shall not be consumed. Many a persuasion fails, for the confidence may be strong and the foundation weak. But here the full assurance of faith can never do justice to the certainty of the event. "I am persuaded that neither death nor life," &c. [*Jay*].

The Harmony of the Divine Attributes in Salvation. Mercy founded on righteousness, and truth vindicating mercy. Justice honoured in mercy. Loving-kindness which is faithful. "Eternal love and immutable faithfulness are the body-guards of Jesus' throne, and they are both the providers and the preservers of all those who in him are made kings and priests unto God. We cannot keep ourselves, and nothing short of Divine mercy and truth can do it; but these both can and will, nor shall the least of God's people be suffered to perish" [*Spurgeon*].

HOMILETICS.

The Universe Governed in the Interests of Humanity.—*Verses* 21—23.

In these verses we have an unbroken chain of causation. The prophet represents God as listening to the prayer of the heavens, to allow them to give fertility to the earth. The heavens fulfil the desire of the earth, and the earth yields its increase to the nation; all things in heaven and earth depend upon God, "so that without his bidding not a drop of rain falls from heaven," says Calvin, "and the earth produces no germ, and consequently all nature would be barren, unless he gave it fertility by his blessing."

I. All things are subordinate to God. 1. *God is the Creator of all things.* All things were made by him at first. He only has absolute being and original essence. Creation is derived from him, The Great First Cause. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." By this simple expression Atheism, Polytheism, Pantheism, and Materialism are denied, and that philosophy which sees nothing apart and distinct from matter is reproved. We have no chance work, no "theory of development" here. Matter is not eternal. The world had a birthday. In the beginning God; God before primordial matter; God before its arrangement into shape and order; God first, and last, and everywhere; God before all things; God the cause of all things, and God the meaning of all things. 2. *God is the Conserver of all things.* That which was dependent at first cannot afterwards become independent. It requires the same hand to sustain as to create a thing. God did not create the world like a carpenter builds a house, to stand still. Having its very being from him, that being cannot be, or continue to be, without him. "By him all things consist," or stand together. God is "the Conservation and Correlation of forces." Not an atom is permitted to fall out of existence. Things may travel far, and take different shapes; but nothing is destroyed. The tiniest dew-drop is long-lived as the mighty ocean, and the feeblest nebule indestructible as

the everlasting hills. As in matter, so in mind and morals. "I know whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever. Nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it." 3. *God is the Governor of all things.* Creation carries with it the idea of control and superintendence. We are under law, mild, gracious, paternal law. But laws of themselves are impotent without the law-giver. Second causes depend upon the First Cause, and cannot put forth any causation without God. God works, and is ever active in his dominions. We are not the inhabitants of a fatherless world, nor is the earth a little province in a forsaken universe. God directs and controls all forces, all agencies, and all events, for the accomplishment of his design. There are no localities with God. He is everywhere present, and ruleth over all. In effecting his great designs he is independent also of every other creature, and renders the purpose and plans of every other power subordinate and auxiliary to his own. Here one sovereign forms an alliance with others for mutual interests and protection. If one were to oppose another the opposition might endanger all states under the alliance. But were all kings and kingdoms of the universe to unite against him, they could not succeed. His throne is above the heavens, above the accidents and contingences of earth. The frame of nature might be unhinged, and the universe fall into commotion, but he reigns undisturbed, God over all, and blessed for evermore. **II. All things co-operate, or work together.** God hears the heavens; they hear the earth; and "the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and they shall hear Jezreel." Here we have the connection and concatenation of all things. "God is not the author of confusion." Providence, therefore, which is God's will in action, is consistent with itself. It is the glory of creation that it everywhere "marches in time, moving to the music of law." Here is the true "music of the spheres." A consummate harmony of relationships so dominates over the whole, that we have never an organic demand without the means of satisfying it, that amid innumerable changes and intermediate ends we find designs of final results. The world is not a machine, and the action of God interference; things are not like particles of dust driven in a whirlwind: but "all things work together," work in harmony, subserve the ends for which they were made, and never cease to conform to God's will, and be a reflex of his wisdom and goodness. The principle of *mediation* is seen everywhere in God's government. "I will *hear* the heavens." Heaven intercedes for earth, and the earth for men upon it. In the common intercourse and concerns of life, one man is blessed through another and for the sake of another. Our material and spiritual gifts come through the medium and mediation of another. But this regular system of established agency connects the result with the sovereign will of God. The first power is a link placed at the foot of the eternal throne. "I will act upon the heavens, the powers of nature above us; they shall act upon the earth, the powers and sources of vegetation beneath us; the earth shall act upon the corn, and the wine, and the oil; the results of their combined and mysterious influence. Thus the chain is complete and unbroken.

> Where one step broken, the great scale's destroyed:
> From nature's chain whatever link you strike,
> Tenth, or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.

III. All things are governed in the interests of the Christian Church. "They shall hear Jezreel." Jez. means the seed of God, the nation pardoned and restored to God. All things not only work together, but good is the result, and this good is "to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. viii. 28). The universe in all its operations and departments contributes to the interests of God's people. Events do not happen in human society and the Christian Church as if left to the mere causalities of nature, and were not under Divine control. Human happiness is promoted and human wants supplied, and men in Christ are the objects of God's eternal purpose. 1. *Human*

wants are satisfied. Corn, wine, and oil are given to Jezreel. Chastisements are removed, Divine favour is restored, and men are daily loaded with benefits and blessings. The gifts of nature are emblems of the gifts of grace. Constant bread, common mercies, and spiritual joys are bestowed with a liberal hand. "Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." 2. *There is spiritual increase in the Church.* "I will sow her unto me in the earth." Persecution and affliction did not diminish Israel. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." God restored her, and in her dispersion she was the means of scattering the knowledge of God and the seeds of Divine truth. Gentiles were converted to God, and the earth will yet be the scene of an increase richer than any yet enjoyed. The fields are already white unto harvest. 3. *There is restoration to friendship with God.* Mercy for those that were unpitied, that had not obtained mercy, and those that were not God's people were to become his people. God would anew declare them his people, and they would affectionately respond to the call. Jew and Gentile, bond and free, Barbarian and Scythian, will be one in Christ. "All that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 21, 22. All nature is closed and would refuse her office to those who rebel against her God, so when he hath withdrawn his curse, and is reconciled to man, all shall combine together for man's good, and by a kind of harmony all parts thereof join their ministries for the service of those who are at unity with him. And, as an image of love, all, from the lowest to the highest, are bound together, each depending on the ministry of that beyond it, and the highest on God. At each link the chain might have been broken; but God, who knit their services together, and had before withheld the rain, and made the earth barren, and laid waste the trees, now made each to supply the other, and led the thoughts of man through the course of causes and effects up to himself, who ever causes all which come to pass [*Pusey*].

Learn—1. The unworthiness of man. A dependent, sinful creature. 2. The dignity of man. All creatures employed to help him.

1. The abundance of God's gifts—"corn, wine, and oil." 2. The goodness of God in supplying them—"I will hear." 3. The medium through which they come—"heaven and earth." 4. The certainty of their bestowment—"It shall come to pass."

Ver. 23. "*I will sow her.*" The Church the channel of blessings to the world. The Church can only bless the world as she is blessed herself.

A beautiful earth. 1. The residence of the Church of God—"I will sow her unto me in the earth." 2. The theatre of the mercy of God—"I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy." 3. The scene of obedience and love to God—"Thou art my people... Thou art my God."

God's mercy. 1. The sum of human wants—"not obtained mercy," "not my people." 2. The source from which it comes—free grace. "I will have mercy." 3. The result of its bestowment—"Thou art my people." 4. The evidence of its possession—"Thou art my God."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—5. *Mothers and children.* When a mother once asked a clergyman when she should begin the education of her child, then four years old, he replied, "Madam, if you have not begun already, you have lost those four years. From the first smile that gleams upon an infant's cheek your opportunity begins." The mother lives again in her children. They unconsciously mould themselves

after her manner, her speech, her conduct, and her method of life. Her habits become theirs, and her character is visibly repeated in them" [*Smiles*]. Children may be strangled, but deeds never: they have an indestructible life, both in and out of our consciousness [*George Eliot*].

Ver. 6, 7. *Affliction.* The hedge stops or gives a turn. God, in pursuance of his covenant, and with a gracious meaning to a revolting people, hedges them up by affliction to stop them from undoing. It is a mercy to be kept out of the pond, though it be by a thorn hedge, sharpest troubles. This stop the Lord doth often give, though not always to sinners; he sometimes lets them run on to fill up their measure of sin and to receive their full measure of punishment. Reproof for sin is a great favour. Though God is angry for what we have done, yet it is a mercy that he will not let us do more, and so make ourselves vile and miserable [*Caryl*].

Ver. 8, 9. *Ingratitude.* When I consider how the goodness of God is abused and perverted by the greatest part of mankind, I cannot but be of his mind that said, "The greatest miracle in the world is God's patience and bounty to an ungrateful man." Oh! what would God not do for his creatures, if thankful, that thus heaps the coals of his mercies upon the heads of his enemies? But think not, sinners, that you shall escape thus. God's mill goes slow, but it grinds small; the more admirable his patience and bounty now is, the more dreadful and insupportable will that fury be which ariseth out of his abused goodness [*Gurnall*].

Ver. 10, 11. *Mirth.* Mirth is a vain and unprofitable passion, not fit for a wise man's entertainment [*Bp. Hall*].

Often when in the full enjoyment of all that this world could bestow, my conscience told me, that in the true sense of the word I was not a Christian. I laughed. I sang. I was apparently gay and happy. But the thought would steal across me,—what *madness* is all this! to continue easy in a state, in which a sudden call out of the world would consign me to everlasting misery, and that when eternal happiness is within my grasp [*Wilberforce*]. Mirth at a funeral is scarce more indecent or unnatural than a perpetual flight of gaiety and burst of exultation in a world like this; a world which may seem a paradise to fools, but is an hospital with the wise [*Dr Young*].

Forgetfulness of God, ver. 13. Such is the character of all engrossing passion, such is the source of sin to which the soul gives way, in avarice, ambition, worldliness, sensual sin, godless science. The soul at last does not rebel against God; it *forgets* him. It is taken up with other things, with itself, with the subjects of its thoughts, the objects of its affections, and it has no time for God, because it has no love for him [*Pusey*].

The gradations of sin. 1. Neglecting God. Neglect of his word, house, and service. 2. Forgetting God. Forgetting his love, goodness, and claims. 3. Departing from God. Departing into danger, error, and punishment.

Forgetfulness of God—a sign of carelessness—a mark of ingratitude and contempt—springs from unbelief and disobedience to God's command (Deut. iv. 9; viii. 14).

Idolatry in the Church—the topstone, the height of all crime—hated by God, and pursued by the sinner. Professed believers are too slow after God, but sinners hasten after their lovers. Let their zeal rebuke our tardiness; their punishment turn our steps to God and duty

The two masters. 1. Jehovah forgotten, Baal loved and worshipped. 2. The sacred days of Jehovah turned into festive days of Baal. 3. The gifts of Jehovah devoted to the service and support of Baal. "No man can serve two masters," &c. Which are you serving? "Choose you this day," &c.

Ver. 18. *Covenant with beasts.* To men who dwell in God the most evil forces become harmless; they wear a charmed life, and defy the deadliest ills. Their feet come into contact with the worst of foes; even Satan himself nibbles at their heel, but in Christ Jesus they have the assured hope of bruising

Satan under their feet shortly. The people of God are the real "George and the Dragon," the true lion-kings and serpent-tamers. Their dominion over the powers of darkness makes them cry, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy word" [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 21, 22. *Providence* is God in motion; God teaching by facts, and God fulfilling, explaining, enforcing his own word. Providence is God rendering natural events subservient to spiritual purposes; rousing our attention when we are careless; reminding us of our obligations when we are ungrateful; recalling our confidence when we depart from him by dependence upon his creatures. Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord [*The Pathway*].

Ver. 23. *My God.* All in this life that is truly good is included in this, my God! if said not from habit, but with a full title to its use. This is a word of *faith*, by which we place our whole reliance upon the almighty, true, and compassionate God; it is a word of *hope*, by which we provide ourselves with all good perpetually in God, who is a Rock of Eternity; a word of *love* and *fellowship*, by which we delight ourselves in the goodness of God, and give ourselves wholly up to him [*Rieger.*] "This God is our God." Is it so? Then infinite riches, infinite beauty, infinite excellence is ours. Is it so? Then all he has is ours; his infinite resources are ours; his providence, his Son, his Spirit, his heaven, are ours (1 Cor. iii. 23). If the character of God be *paternal*, then your character should be *filial*, and the leading features of that are dependence and love.

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1.] The significant pair is introduced again with a fresh application. **In a second symbolic marriage, the faithful, chastening love of God is set forth to adulterous Israel. Love**] Not take, as ch. i. 2. **Woman**] Many think another person, not his former wife; others, that she was his former wife, but unfaithful and living with another man, an adulteress. This love greater, higher than the former. One proved disturbed relation, and the other restoration to God. **Friend**] Heb. neighbour, and husband (Jer. iii. 20; Cant. v. 17); the prophet himself intended. **Accord**] Hos. must frame his life to represent the ingratitude of men and the wonderful love of God. **Who look**] Lit. they are looking; a continuous act and a contemporary circumstance. God was loving them while they were looking to idols. **Flagons of wine**] Lit. of grapes, used in idolatry (Jer. vii. 18; xliv. 19); or drunkenness and vice sanctioned by it—a figurative representation of service, which appeals to sense, gratifies carnal desire and sensual indulgence (cf. Job xx. 12). **2. Bought her**] with money and grain. Money half the price of a common slave (Ex. xxxi. 32); the grain of the coarsest kind, not wheat, but *barley*, the food of animals, and the offering of one accused of idolatry, an expression of worthlessness and degradation. **3. Abide for me**] Lit. "many days wilt thou sit for me;" in a state of solitude and widowhood, debarred from intercourse with any man, and detained until restored to God himself (Deut. xxi. 13). Now God will have no more conjugal intercourse with Israel than any other people. He will cut off idolatry and suspend his relation to them for an indefinite time. **4. Without a king**] Without civil polity. **Sac.**] Without national worship and religion. **Image**] Lit. monument, consecrated to Baal (Ex. xxiii. 24); pillars forbidden to be reared (Lev. xxvi. 1; Deut. xvi. 22); widely spread in Israel (2 Kings iii. 2; xvii. 10) and in Judah (1 Kings xiv. 23; 2 Chron. xvi. 2). **Ephod**] Shoulder-dress of the high priest, to which the Urim and Thummim were attached, and the medium of revelation between God and his people. **Teraphim**] Penates worshipped as the givers of earthly prosperity and revealers of future events. This threat fulfilled in the ten tribes, in Assyrian captivity, and in the present time they are without monarchy, priesthood, and the worship of Jehovah. Judah after her captivity had a government, but not an independent king; she rejected Christ, and then she was doomed to the judgment of God, and efforts to restore her have yet failed. 5. **Seek**] Heb. a diligent, intensive search, a religious search used in regard to God [*Pusey*]. **David their king**] *i.e.* the Seed, the Son of D., the Messiah

(Ezek. xxxiv 23; Amos ix 11). **Fear the Lord**] Lit. "will tremble towards Jehovah and towards his goodness; stronger than seeking one upon whom they depend. Tremble with distress and anguish, conscious of guilt and unworthiness, and utterly unable to help themselves. **Goodness**] In gifts of which they had been deprived This fulfilled in the gathering round David's greater Son, and in the universal conversion of Israel to God.

HOMILETICS.

THE WONDROUS LOVE.—*Verses* 1—5

In this chapter God's grace is marvellously set forth to his ancient people. Though fallen and unfaithful, the prophet is commanded to love. "*Go yet*," give them line upon line, precept upon precept, sign after sign, and act after act, to remind them of this truth. Not only must the *disposition* exist to love, but an *attestation* of it. Hosea must again represent the conduct of God in displaying his love and urging to penitence. Men are repeatedly urged to believe the gospel and welcome the Saviour. God multiplies mercies when judgments are richly deserved. The grand truth of these verses is the lesson which John taught so affectionately afterwards, "God is love."

I. **Love in its highest form.** Israel had fallen into idolatry, and was guilty of adultery. Lust and sensuality were mixed with illicit worship. God, their chief good, was forsaken and lovers trusted. 1. *Love to the guilty sinner.* Men have gone astray from God, and live having no hope, and without God in the world. Alienated from God by wicked works, they do not seek nor serve God. God is not in all their thoughts. They are given to pleasure, gratification, and shame. Some men are not even moral. They are corrupted by their worldly, selfish principles. Loving sin, and rendering homage to improper, unholy objects, they have become like the gods they worship. Man is lost, spiritually lost, lost to God and to his highest interests—unholy in character, helpless in condition, and unlike God in everything. "There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone (aside) out of the way," apostatized from God, from his laws, and from principles of truth and right; "they are together become (filthy) unprofitable," in their conduct and practice. They are depraved in heart and defiled in life (Ps. xiv. 2, 3; cf. Rom. iii. 12, 13). Yet man thus lost and depraved is the object of Christ's care. God loves us, even in our weakness and worldliness, in our "crimes and carnality." "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Christ seeks to bring us back to God, to deliver us from our sins, to correct the sinful and selfish principles of our nature, and to make us sons of God. The most distant and degraded, the most wretched and licentious, all who are conscious of their lost and ruined condition, may come to God. Poor Joseph, with a parcel of yarn hanging over his shoulders, heard the message of joy from the text: "This is a faithful," &c. John Newton in preaching to the prisoners at Newgate wept, and they wept with him, as he enlarged on "this faithful saying." "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ came into the world to save sinners." 2. *Love to the unfaithful professor.* God's love is not simply to the wretched and perishing. To love the distressed is comparatively easy; but to love the unfaithful and the adulteress, those who add guilt to unworthiness, idolatry to apostasy, and provocation to ingratitude, is more than humanity can do. Men respect the just and love the good; but God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners. We may even love when immorality is allied to woe, and hatred to personal offensiveness; but love in its purest, freest form, love in God, passes over demerit and offence, withstands provocation and insult, and blesses those that curse. The unworthy servant is sent away from our employ. The unfaithful friend is forsaken and condemned. But what shall we say of unfaithful Israel? What shall be done to those who have loved and forsaken their love, sworn allegiance, yet broken off and are guilty of fornication? "Go yet, love a woman"

most guilty and most unworthy; love with a definite and Divine love, "*according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel;*" a love without a parallel and beyond expression. "I know that the mercy of God is infinite," said a brother of Whitfield, the great preacher, to Lady Huntingdon; "but, my lady, there is no mercy for me, a backslider, a wretch, entirely lost." "I am glad to hear it, Mr Whitfield," said she. "I am glad that you are a lost man." "What! glad that I am a lost man, my lady!" "Yes, truly glad; for Jesus came into the world to save the lost." He blessed God for his love, and the same evening died in peace. God still yearns over those who have fallen a second time. The backslider and unfaithful professor may yet return. God remembers his covenant and will ever fulfil his word. "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep mine anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God." **II. Love in its active operation.** All feeling, all emotion in the heart demands and seeks an outward expression. Feeling will not slumber in the soul any more than ignited gunpowder will smoulder away without explosion. Man is not a mere block, to move and be moved by attraction and force. Nor is he a mere physical structure; but a being of sympathy and emotion. Love is one of the strongest passions, and on whatever object it is fixed, will lead to intense energy and activity. There may be pity without help; benevolence which merely wishes good to be done. We may feel for the sufferer and not interpose; retain our sentiment and say, "Be ye warmed, be ye clothed," without giving "the things needful for the body." Love is deeds, not desires, nor words. Its objects are out of itself, and according to its strength and opportunity it reaches others. "God so loved the world," that "he gave" something, he did something. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us." "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." Measure the love by the gift and the deed. Things may represent feeling and value, desire and delight, but *persons* are the greatest sacrifice. In giving a person, God gave the greatest of all persons—"his only begotten Son." Christ shed his precious blood to redeem men from sin and death. Damon had great affection for his friend Pythias. When Shelley gave Leigh Hunt a thousand pounds to liberate him, the act was a proof of no common friendship, and showed that he valued his friend more than his gold. God's love excels all other, seeks to restore the fallen and most degraded to himself. He is not satisfied with anything less than complete restoration, complete salvation. The prophet bought the "woman beloved," redeemed her from slavery and idolatry, and eventually took her to himself. Life must be supported, a bridal gift bestowed, and she must be re-instated in his heart and home. "If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?" **III. Love in its necessary discipline.** According to Scripture, all suffering under God's administration has a *moral end*, and must not be viewed by itself, without any reference to results. In some cases it is judicial, penal, and exemplary in solemn terms. But in its bearing upon God's people, it is corrective, given for a gracious purpose and a blessed experience, progressive sanctification and final perfection. "God chastens us not for his pleasure, but for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." This design should help us to bear it even most frequent and severe. "My son, thank God for me," said Dr Arnold on his death-bed. "Thank God, Tom, for giving me this pain. I have suffered so little pain in my life, that I feel it is very good for me now God has given it me, and I do so thank him for it." That *man* should be capable of Divine holiness and fellowship with God, proves the capacity of his mental and the dignity of his moral nature. Affliction is chosen as a suitable and sovereign remedy to cure our evils. We are estranged from God and given to the creature. Our attachments to wealth, power, and ambition, to pleasure and sensual indulgence, are not easily broken. God's method of weaning from the

world, and breaking up unhallowed and degrading attachment to sin, is by removing the object from us, visiting us with sickness, or smiting with a curse, what we love instead of him. Israel, like a captive woman remaining in the house, separated from her master, bewailing her captivity, was to sit for many days in solitary discipline (Deut. xxi. 13; Ex. xxiv. 14; Jer. iii. 2); weaned or free from idolatry, yet not immediately received into friendship and favour with God. They were also to abide many days without prince or priest, temple or sacrifice. Hence—1. *Love disciplines by solitude* "Thou shalt abide (remain quiet) for me many days." God often withdraws us from scenes of pleasure and mirth, deprives us of friends and means of grace, and confines us to beds of sickness and solitude. Sequestered from the excitements of life, cut off from the objects of our love, we should "be still and know that I am God." Murmur not, nor complain; but submit in patience and hope. "So will I also be for thee." Our deepest experience, our spiritual discipline, must be in solitude. We must suffer alone, and get wisdom alone. We must learn the evil of our ways and God's displeasure against sin, not in the friction of society, but in the lonely chamber and the closet. This is the experience of all good men. Our affections are kindled, our resolutions fortified, and our hearts prepared, in solitude. Christ began public life with forty days in the wilderness, was made perfect through suffering, and had to tread the wine-press alone. Solitude and suffering alone are means of education; designed by God to chasten and refine, to awaken, convert, and restore the sinner and the backslider to himself. Afflictions are not messengers of his avenging wrath, but tokens of parental love; and in sending them he acts not as an angry judge, but a kind and forgiving father; correcting in love, and designing to bring forth "the peaceable fruit of righteousness in them which are exercised thereby." 2. *Love disciplines by deprivation.* First, *By depriving of the supports of life.* "Without a king and without a prince." A king was Israel's special choice, and a king was Israel's support. The court of Solomon was the glory of Israel, and Solomon's son was the favourite king. Kings and princes were commanders and leaders of the people. When these were slain, when civil governments were overturned, they were left without support and defence. God not only gives, but takes away. Kings, princes, magistrates, and judges, are ordained of God, and are often taken away by his providence for the sins of the people. Individuals are often bereft of bread, friendship, and support, and families of honour and prosperity, that they may know that Jehovah alone can deliver and save. Second, *By depriving of the enjoyments of life.* "And without sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod." Sacrifice was the distinctive feature in the Jewish religion. To take away sacrifice was to rob them of their prestige and religion, their enjoyments and freedom. They had no legal priesthood, no liberty of public worship, and no oracle to guide them in duty and distress. To be deprived of religious teachers and religious ordinances is sad indeed. But comforts die, riches fly away, friends forsake us, and our enjoyments often decay. Our lovers disappoint us, and we are compelled to "return and seek the Lord our God," who afflicts in mercy and draws in love. **IV. Love in its blessed results.** After a time of Divine chastisement and discipline, Israel will "turn and seek Jehovah their God, and David their king, and will go trembling to Jehovah and to his goodness." Jehovah will be found of them that seek him with solicitude. He is our only hope and dependence. If we abandon idols and turn to him, we shall again taste his goodness and rejoice in the light of his countenance. 1. *Love draws the penitent.* When the sinner discovers his folly, and repents of his sin; when he feels his helplessness, and cries for mercy; he needs some encouragement and hope. The Bible reveals a God of love. God in Christ upholds the law in love, atones for sin, and loves the sinner. Mercy invites, and the weary and heavy laden come and find rest in Jesus. Hope beams upon the soul. The love of God warms and breaks up the heart, like the spring breaking up frozen waters. This love reaches

and draws the contrite sinner, and he resolves to return to his home and his rest. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have *I drawn thee.*" 2. *Love turns the backslider.* Professing Christians are often unfaithful to their vows and their God. They fall into error and backslide from God. "Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer." "My people are bent to backslide from me." But God still watches over them, seeks to chastise and correct them, and restore them to his favour. Peter denied his Master, but was overcome by the look of love, and went out and wept bitterly. He felt his guilt and was despairing of mercy, but the message of joy encouraged him—"Go and tell Peter." The description of the world without God, is the personal experience, the humble confession, of God's people—"All we, like sheep, have gone astray." They are led away by open sins or "secret faults;" by sense, fancy, or appetite; and are found in crooked paths of sin and shame. Strange tendency to wander from a God so good, and privileges so great! What can induce men to turn their backs upon their best friend, and sin against the most precious love that was ever known? There is no enjoyment in distance from God. The child of God cannot be happy separated from God, and will not entirely lose remembrance of forsaken blessing. God seeks his own. Christ, the good shepherd, goes after that which is lost, until he finds and restores it. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandment." 3. *Love begets loyalty.* Israel shall not only seek the Lord their God, but "David their king." A prince shall rule over them again, and they shall be a loving, loyal people. Love subdues the haughtiest, brings back the most distant, and wins all favours. Love overcomes *a*pathy and *anti*pathy. Severity creates hatred; mercy, love, kindness; "a kiss for a blow" will ever be found the best antidote to crime. Enmity to God is the nature, the very essence, of the carnal mind. Destroy its enmity, and you destroy its life and power. God destroys by his love, disarms all opposition, and begets love in return. "Truth is light, but love is life." "Love is power." Knowledge does not impart power to obey. Nothing but love, an appreciation of the Divine character and goodness, can beget true loyalty in the heart. We have the manifestation and method of love in the gospel. New life is quickened within us, and God speaks with power to our hearts. New affections expel meaner ones; moral activity is guided by faith. We love and labour most earnestly for God, who has blessed us. "We love him because he first loved us."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Truly the prophet in two respects has set forth great things. For, in the first place, he could not describe sin as being more dreadful than he here pictures it in the sin of the adulteress. And, again, he extols highly the love of God by this image, when he says that he is animated by love toward the adulteress [*Luther*].

Looking unto other gods. Placing our affections and confidence in other things—preference for the creature instead of the Creator, who is infinite in goodness and resources.

Flagons of wine. 1. A type of sin—sweet, sensual, and unwholesome food. 2. An image of idol worship—fleshly in its nature, poor in its consequences. "The solemn and strict religion of Jehovah is plain but wholesome food; whereas idolatry is relaxing food, which is only sought after by epicures and men of depraved tastes" [*Hengstenberg*]. Compare Job xx. 12, where sin is figuratively described as food which is sweet as new honey in the mouth, but turns into gall in the belly.

Ver. 4. In this condition Jews have ever since remained: free from idolatry, and in a state of waiting for God, yet looking in vain for a Messiah, since they had not and would not receive him who came unto them; praying to God, yet without sacrifice for sin; not owned by God, yet kept distinct and apart by his providence, for a future yet to be revealed. God has been *towards them*

He has preserved them from mingling with idolaters and Mohammedans. Oppression has not extinguished them, favour has not bribed them. He has kept them from abandoning their mangled worship, or the Scriptures which they understand not, and whose true meaning they believe not; they have fed on the raisin-husks of a barren ritual and unspiritual legalism, since the Holy Spirit they have grieved away. Yet they exist still, a monument to *us* of God's abiding wrath on sin, as Lot's wife was to them, encrusted, stiff, lifeless, only that we know that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live [*Pusey*]. 1. Cutting short of outward mercies, should cut off from sin and humble us that we may be ripe for mercy; and whatever our frame and carriage may be, yet by affliction God will cut short occasions of sin, as the adulteress is shut up and dieted, is secluded from her lovers. 2. The Lord may intend much good to them whom he brings into contempt, and to a low condition; for he sequesters and shuts up Israel with an eye to marry her [*Hutcheson*].

HOMILETICS.

"Fear the Lord and His Goodness."

This is the drift of the discourse, the right and proper result of the goodness of God upon our hearts. I address myself first of all *to God's people;* secondly, *to such as are yet unreconciled to him.*

I. First, to God's people. You have received of this goodness two ways, the first and the higher is his spiritual goodness; the second form is the providential bounty of God toward you. First survey the *spiritual goodness* of God to you. It was no small goodness to choose you at first—no slight goodness which ordained a covenant on your behalf with Christ Jesus, and which fulfilled that covenant. Think of God's goodness to you when unconverted: what long-suffering! what tenderness! You have been filled with joy and peace in believing; led first into one truth and then other, and God has outdone all you asked or thought. All this should constrain you to fear the Lord. First, there should be a fear of *admiration.* Saints who have tasted the Lord's goodness should fear him with worshipful fear of *adoration.* The goodness of God to us should suggest *aspiration.* The greatness of it should suggest to us great service; the continuance of it should move us to persevere in honouring him; the disinterestedness of the love of God should make us ready for any self-denials; and above all, the singularity and speciality of his goodness should determine us to be singular and remarkable in our consecration to him. We should also fear the Lord and his goodness in the sense of *affection.* We must fear him with *humiliation.* The goodness of God ought to make us fear him with a sacred *anxiety,* an anxiety of a double character. Am I really his? or if I be his, and have such goodness bestowed upon me, am I rendering to him what he may expect? We should fear the Lord, lastly, with the fear of *resignation.* Now for the goodness of God *in providential matters.* Fear God much more than ever before, *lest these temporals should become your god.* Fear God, *lest you should undervalue your responsibilities.* Fear God and his goodness, *lest he turn his hand* and make you poor. You should fear the Lord now, especially while you have your children about you, and you are in health, because *you will have to leave all these things very soon.* Fear God and his goodness, because *he is better than all his gifts of providence.* II. A few solemn words to such as are not God's people, but enemies to God, careless and yet prosperous. You have provoked God, and if justice had been done, where would you have been? Will you not fear and serve him *out of gratitude?* Do you not feel ashamed that so good a God should be so ill repaid? Ought you not also to *fear God out of hope?* If he has dealt so mercifully with you in temporals, have you not every reason to expect that he will do as well for you in spirituals? Should you not fear the Lord and his good-

ness out of great *admiration?* for how well, how kindly, how strangely well has he dealt with you! Lastly, let me say you may well fear God out of *apprehension* concerning his goodness, for the goodness which he now renders to you will pass away ere long. There is trouble for you in store except you turn and repent; first one rod—sickness to the child; then others—such as loss in business, sickness to yourself, death to your wife, &c. Woe to that man whom neither goodness nor severity can move; whom neither loving-kindness can draw, nor justice drive. For such there remaineth nothing but cast away for ever, from God whom he would not love, from Christ whom he would not accept, from mercy which he despised, from love which he rejected [*Spurgeon*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Affliction a discipline. This sorrow comes not from the ground, nor yet affliction from the dust. It has been beautifully said, that sorrow is the river of God's love flowing through shaded scenery. In all sorrow there is a limit—namely, that fixed by considerations for our own good. God is encompassing our path with thorns, lest we should wander into regions that chill or scorch us to the death. By some high method he overrules our narrow wishes and petty aims, and subordinates them to his own vast and beneficent designs. Misfortunes have been angels' visits unawares. Amid the changes and the chances of this mortal life let us walk humbly with God and fix our hearts and hopes in him.

The power of love. Is there not an invincible power in tenderness? The old fable tells us of the sun and the wind which strove to see which could first remove the traveller's cloak. The wind blustered, but the traveller only wrapped his cloak more tightly about him, but when the sun shone warm and soft upon his head, the traveller speedily cast off his cloak. If God had dealt roughly with you, I should not have wondered if you had said—"I will not serve him;" but after his being so kind with you, off with that cloak of indifference and be his servant. Will not the warmth of God's love thaw your soul? The chilling frost of threatenings might have hardened you into a rock of ice, but this sunshine of prosperity and love which the Lord has given you, will it not melt you, will it not bring you to Jesus? [*Spurgeon*].

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Controv.**] = a legal action (cf. Mic. vi. 2; Joel iii. 2), or ground of complaint with the ten tribes (ver. 15). **Truth**] *i. e.* truthfulness in word or deed, no conscience nor uprightness (Prov. iii. 3; Jer. iii. 4). **Mercy**] Affection, tenderness, and love; no compassion to the needy. Truth and love cannot be separated. "Truth cannot be sustained without mercy; and mercy without truth makes men negligent; so that the one ought to be mingled with the other." **No know.**] which produces love and fear; wilfully ignorant; hence injustice the upper hand. **2. Swearing**] a breach of the second, **stealing** of the eighth commandment. In Heb. these nouns of action give emphasis and picture the scene, nothing but evil, and that continually. **Break**] out like waters beyond all bounds and restraint (2 Sam. v. 20). **Blood**] Lit. bloods, shed with violence. **Toucheth**] "Murder was so common, that no space was left between its acts" [*Henderson*]. **3. Mourn**, by drought (1 Kings xviii. 17, 18). As a consequence vegetation scorched, animal life wastes away, and pools dry, the greatest calamity that could happen in the East. **4. Strive**] Lit. only man, let him not strive, and let not man reprove. God had taken the matter in his own hands, reproof would only aggravate their guilt, man must not interfere. Some give, let none reprove one another; each must look to his own sins. **Priest**] The judge and tribunal to decide law-suits (Deut. xvii. 12, 13), to dispute with whom was the highest contumacy. **5.**] People and prophet would fall by night and day without intermission. **Mother**] The whole nation destroyed. **6. Know.**] Lit. *the* knowledge of God (ver. 1), which is life to the soul. **Reject**] Utterly reject thee from being

a priestly nation (Ex. xix. 6); deprived of priestly rank, and made like heathens. God repays in kind; despise the truth, this will suppress it. **7. Increased**] in number and wealth. **Shame**] *i. e.* dishonoured by the loss of all. Some, in proportion as priests were elevated in power and dignity above the people, they surpassed them in sin. **8. They**] The priests made gain on the sins of the people, lived upon them. **Set their heart**] Lusted after, strongly desired, instead of checking iniquity. They encouraged idolatry for selfish ends. **9. Punish**] Visit upon them. **Reward**] Make to return upon them their doings; rank and wealth will not preserve them from sharing the fate of the nation. Presumptuous sins return to their own bosom (Prov. i. 31). **10. Enough**] Not be satisfied. **Left off**] keeping, observing Jehovah (Zech. xi. 11). All other means of increase failed. Polygamy against the law, and will bring the curse of God. **12. My people**] *Their wood*, give keenness to the reproach. God's people seek to be instructed by a staff, depend on wooden idols constantly and entirely! **From under**] his authority and subjection. **13. Tops**] Thought to be near God and heaven (Deut. xii. 2). **Shadow**] screening from the heat of the sun, and filling the mind with certain awe. God delivers up to vile affections as a punishment for idolatry (Rom. i. 26). **14.**] God turns from the reckless nation as unworthy of being mentioned, and speaks in the third person. **They**] Husbands and fathers go aside to be alone with harlots. **Sacrifice**] Come to the altar with them instead of their own wives, "the climax of shameless licentiousness." The young cannot be blamed, for the older are much worse. Ver. 15—19 a warning to Judah not to partake of Israel's guilt. **15. Come not**] by pilgrimages to places of idolatrous worship. **Swear not**] in temples of idols. "The confession of Jehovah is hypocrisy in the mouth of an idolater; pretended piety, which is more dangerous than open ungodliness, because it lulls the conscience to sleep" [*Keel*]. **16. Backsliding heifer**] Stubborn and refractory (Jer. vii. 24). **As a lamb**] Free play. If Israel would not submit to the yoke, they might go where they liked, become prey of wolves in the field, be given up to exile and dispersion. **17. Joined**] Closely and voluntarily bound, and cannot give them up (cf. Num. xxv. 3; 1 Cor. vi. 16, 17). **Alone**] Lit. give him rest from all further expostulation, which he will not hear [*Pusey*]. Give him up as incorrigible [*Boothr.*]. Have nothing to do with him. He is bent on his ruin, let him suffer the consequences (Jer. vii. 16); punishment cannot long be delayed. **18. Sour**] A metaphor for degeneracy in principle (Is. i. 22); turned, as we say of milk. They had lost all their life and taste of goodness [*Pusey*]. **Rulers**] Lit. shields, protectors, and supporters of the state. **Love**] Avarice and luxury. No remedy against corruption when rulers are bribed. **19. Bound her up**] A tempest will suddenly and violently seize them, wrap them up, and carry them away (Ps. xviii. 11; civ. 3; Is. lvii. 13). **Ashamed**] of idols and disappointed in hope. Disappointment is certain to those who seek out of God what can only be found in him.

HOMILETICS

God's Controversy with a Guilty People.—*Verses* 1—5.

The prophet now begins to speak more plainly. Israel was bound to God by legal covenant. God only wishes justice to be done, and will not subject them to disadvantages. But they have infringed upon his rights, neglected their obligations, and forgotten their relation to him. Hence the suit-at-law. The land, swept of fidelity, goodness, and love, is brought to shame and desolation.

I. The nation summoned into court. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel." The whole people, with prophets and priests, are called to the judgment-seat of God to make their defence or hear their indictment. Men are inattentive and negligent. They disregard the word of God, and forget things which make for their peace. If Demosthenes had need to reprove the Athenian senate for inattention to his speech on important affairs, how much greater reproof do the careless and indifferent require now. It is sad to be given up to a spirit of slumber, to have eyes and not see, ears and not hear. None so deaf as those who will not hear. God speaks loudly and continually in his providence and word—"once, yea, twice, yet man perceiveth it not." In creation wisdom, power, and goodness are manifest; in works of judgment and mercy God's voice is heard; by his prophets and his Son God expostulates, but men neglect the warnings. This needful admonition suggests a sad condition. One would think that every one would gather round the feet of Jesus, and, like Samuel, cry, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth!" But sinners are—1. Ignorant; 2. Careless; 3. Obdurate. God's cause will be pleaded by the words of his mouth, and the wonders of his providence. He speaks with authority, demands fair hearing, and gives fair warning. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." **II. The nation accused of guilt.** The indictment of Israel is given negatively and positively. We have the absence of virtue and the presence of evil. There must be one or the

other. The human mind does not like a vacuum. Dethrone good, you set up evil. A mind unoccupied and a life of sin are the impersonations of wretchedness. Some object must engage attention. The heart must have something really good, or thought to be good, to lay hold of. Wrest it away from one thing, without the substitution of another, you leave a void as painful as hunger. It may be dispossessed of one thing, but it cannot be desolated of all. If grace does not abound in thought and conduct, sin will much more abound. In Israel there was—1. *A declension of religion.* "There is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land". . . (*a*) "*No truth.*" Truth is the bond of union and the basis of human happiness. "Without this virtue," says Jeremy Collier, "there is no reliance upon language, no confidence in friendship, and no security in promises and oaths." Neither talent nor genius can be trusted unless based on truthfulness. This is the foundation of personal excellence and human character; this is the health and ornament of the nation; loyal adherence to truth is the secret of a nation's power and a nation's glory. When there is no truth, but falsehood; when men's acts are at variance with their words; then there is no respect, nor honesty, nor security. What a sad state of society! We depart from truth when we state as true what we do not know to be true, when we intentionally produce a false impression, when we deceive and designedly mislead. Often painful wrongs are inflicted by covert innuendos and malignant insinuations. Half a fact is a whole falsehood, and he who colours truth by false methods of telling it is a liar. "Of all duties," says a writer, "the love of truth, with faith and constancy in it, ranks first and highest. Truth is God. To love God and to love truth are one and the same." (*b*) "*Nor mercy.*" Mercy is pity or compassion which one man shows toward another in misery; clemency towards our neighbours (Prov. xx. 28; Luke x. 37). "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee; bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart." Mercy and truth are the glorious perfections of God always in harmony and action. We rest upon them for salvation, and should copy them in life. The want of one neutralizes the effect of the other. A man may be truthful, and yet not merciful. Just in his dealings to others, yet "as hard as flint." Mercy has been urged upon man from the very beginning to counteract his selfishness and cruelty. "It becomes the throned monarch better than his crown," and "earthly power doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice." Kindness evokes kindness, and our own happiness is increased by our benevolence. "Kind words cost little." Friendly conduct may meet with ungrateful return; but absence of gratitude on the part of the receiver cannot destroy the pleasure of the giver. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (*c*) "*Nor knowledge of God.*" There was no sense of honesty and obligation, no justice nor humanity. Truth and benevolence had been disregarded. The fragmentary man was seen in disordered society and ignorance of God in a land specially his own, and which should have presented his glory and preserved his name. The knowledge of God is a necessity of our moral nature, and lies at the foundation of all morality and religion. Man can have no obligation to mere laws of nature, and feel no sense of responsibility to an impersonal being. God has revealed himself in his works and word. We are related to him as intelligent and moral beings. We owe duty to ourselves and our fellow-men because God wills and commands it. But God is not recognized, and then forgotten in motive and duty. God is not seen through his works, and in Israel and England we have a succession of human beings instructed in the laws and duties of society, with the character and even the existence of the law-giver omitted. We have the means of knowing and worshipping God, but no true, practical knowledge of God. The supreme influence of God is lost in the family and in the land, in custom and law, hence a spirit of subordination and licentiousness. We have sound creeds but ungodly lives; theoretic, but little practical knowledge of God. If men "hold the truth in unrighteousness," check the development of it in their lives, and reject the knowledge of God; they

begin the downward course to idolatry and grossest sin. The history of the heathen world and the results of the French Revolution prove this knowledge to be the safeguard of the people, to be necessary (1) *to preserve mental vigour.* If the knowledge of God is not thought worth keeping in the mind, then the mind itself will become worthless and degenerate, "a reprobate mind" (Rom. i. 28). (2) *to preserve true morality.* Progressive vice, penal suffering, and fearful lusts are the certain results of rejecting the knowledge of God. "If there be not a God, we must invent one," cried one of the leading spirits of France. "Some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame." 2 *A corrupt morality.* "Swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery," were common practices. These, and nothing but these, were seen all around. Religion and morality are bound together. Without the one there can be no true existence of the other. Ignorance of God is a source of wrong practice, a source of all evils. Where there is no love and truth, no regard to God, there will be vices contrary to these virtues. When the soul or the land is empty of good, it will be full of evil. Evils of every description abounded in Israel. Society was penetrated with vice and profligacy. Perjury and falsehood corrupted the morals and manners of the people. Religion and virtue were swamped. Family and home were alike tainted. Domestic purity, religious sanctity, no longer restrained and bound society together. The laws by which God had fenced the estate, the life, and character of men were broken; violence and bloodshed knew no bounds, carried everything before them, and like a flood swept the nation to ruin. **III. The nation punished.** "Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away," &c. General depravity produces general punishment. God in judgment sent a universal drought, such as that which prevailed in the reign of Ahab. Vegetation was to suffer, animal life decay, and sea and land groaned beneath the visitation. If man will not love God, neither shall God's creatures help man. For man's interests and theirs are bound together in the wondrous providence of God. 1. *Man's sins affect inanimate creation.* Man was not made for the earth, but the earth was made for man. By successive steps and gradual events the earth was prepared and fitted to be his residence. For him power had stilled the conflict of chaos and restored "the reign of law." For his sake goodness had beautified the earth and clothed it with vegetation. In wisdom the various animals were subject to his control, and he had dominion over all the earth. Man had to replenish, subdue, and govern the earth (Gen. i. 28). (*a*) *Man is related to material creation by his physical nature.* His name (Adam), man, is formed from the (adamah) material of which his body is composed. He is related to the physical laws of the universe as a *physical* being, and is amenable to gravitation, mechanical force, and chemical action. As an *organized* being he is subject to organic laws. Every great characteristic by which vegetable life is distinguished from inorganic matter and animal life, is found in him. He also possesses *animal* instincts like the inferior creatures. Thus man's constitution in its threefold character, of physical, organic, and sentient, "took up the strain of creation which had preceded his coming, in praise of the power, and wisdom, and goodness of God." (*b*) *Man has brought a curse upon material creation by his first sin.* The earth is not like the garden of Eden in which he was placed at first; "cursed is the ground for thy sake." It does not yield its produce with its original ease and abundance. We have disorder and decay, malformation and barrenness. "Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth," with all our toil and daily labour. When man fell from his original position with God, the earth lost its fruitfulness and dignity, and now "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain" under its bondage and corruption, and is waiting for its freedom and greater blessing (Rom. viii. 20—22). (*c*) *Man injures material creation by his immoral conduct.* Material forces are largely at his command. He can change and create; beautify and adorn:

impair and destroy. Solomon saw the field of the slothful "all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down" (Prov. xxiv. 30, 31). A life of mere animal sensual indulgence, manual or mental sloth will bring to poverty. Idleness and neglect will bring drought and failure of crops (Hag. i. 2—11). Vice, idolatry, and licentiousness will spread their effects and spoil the face of nature. Creation is in sympathy with man, responds to his moral life, and is blessed or wasted by his moral conduct. In peace and plenty, under the benediction and providence of God, the valleys shout and sing for joy. In famine and war, under the curse and sin of man, "the land shall mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish." "How long shall the land mourn and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein?" (Jer. xii. 4; Ps. cvii. 34). 2. *Man's sins affect the animal creation.* We should regard the animal world with due feeling. Life in its lowest form is the gift of God. We should not abuse any creature which God pronounced good and intended for our welfare. The inferior creatures have been useful to man and subservient to his interests in many ways. (*a*) They have been a source of sustenance. (*b*) A source of commerce. (*c*) The means of training his powers of body and mind. But they have been punished for man's idolatry. Their growth and continuance have been hindered by man's sin. As necessities of life they have been cut off, and as objects of adoration they have been smitten with the plague. "He turned their waters into blood and slew their fish" (Ps. cv. 29). Internal blessing and outward prosperity shall go hand in hand when man is restored to right relation with God. Then shall the original promise be fulfilled, and God will give peace in the land; rid it of evil beasts: and its inhabitants shall lie down, and nothing shall disturb their rest (Lev. xxvi. 6). **IV. The nation punished without mercy.** They had rejected God, and God would leave them to their fate. They had despised the priests, and he would slay their prophets. By degrees they had hardened themselves and grown stubborn in sin, and thus ripened themselves for destruction. When the Lord has a controversy with a people and they will not hear, it is useless to strive with them. They who resist the Spirit and the ministers of God, resist God himself. "He that despiseth you despiseth me." Their state is most desperate and deplorable. 1. *Punishment without intermission.* "Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night." There would be no time free from destruction, night and day calamities should never cease. Darkness would be no protection, and day would be no security. Terror by night found them helpless and exposed. Arrows from cunning foes and with deadly aims flew by day. Pestilence, shrouded in mystery, marched on unseen, to infect the home and alarm the city. Destruction wasted at noon-day, and there was no shield nor buckler. This reminds us of the Great Plague of London, when evil befell the city, and its inhabitants were stricken with death. 2. *Punishment without exemption.* People and prophets fell together. God's judgments are impartial. Rank and title, wealth and worldly distinctions, are of no avail. "Label men how you please," says Herbert Spencer, "with titles of 'upper,' and 'middle,' and 'lower,' you cannot prevent them from being units of the same society, acted upon by the same spirit of the age, moulded after the same type of character. The mechanical law, that action and reaction are equal, has its moral analogue. The deed of one man to another tends to produce a like effect upon both, be the deed good or bad. In whatever rank you see corruption, be assured it equally pervades all ranks; be assured it is the symptom of a bad social diathesis. Whilst the virus of depravity exists in one part of the body-politic, no other part can remain healthy." Man's evil character and influence blend and bind him up with others. Not a particle is lost, but the whole is taken up and produces its results in the general community. Collectively and individually the destruction of all is declared. Root and branch were to be cut off. As a nation they could not escape. "I will destroy thy

mother," and as individuals they could not flatter themselves with hope. "*Thou* shalt fall." 3. *Punishment without human sympathy.* "Let no man strive nor reprove another." Man is forbidden to interfere or aid. God will implead them, and none can contradict or evade his judgments. We know not how to judge. We condemn and acquit without cause. We are ignorant and helpless ourselves. "None can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." All are alike guilty, condemned and exposed to death. Christ alone can deliver us. The redemption of the soul is precious, but human efforts, gold and silver, and a world of rubies, could not purchase it. Riches cannot ward off judgment, nor tears avail with God. The Scripture hath concluded, shut up as in a prison, all in unbelief, not that God might condemn, but that he might have mercy upon all men (Gal. iii. 22). 4. *Punishment without Divine help.* Criminals are sometimes recommended to mercy and delivered from punishment; but Israel was stubborn and incorrigible, and God forbids any to remonstrate or reprove. Christian reproof and expostulation bring sinners to repentance and are of immense service in setting them right. It is one of the duties of friendship. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." But when men hate reproof and defy the judgments of God, then they are let alone to reap their folly. Their doom is certain: "Thou *shalt* fall," and "I *will* destroy." "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still." "The fruit of sin in time," says Chalmers, "when arrived at full and finished maturity, is just the fruit of sin through eternity. It is merely the sinner reaping what he has sown. It makes no violent or desultory step, from sin in time to hell in eternity. The one emerges from the other, as does the fruit from the flower. It is simply that the sinner *be filled with his own ways, and that he eat the fruit of his own devices.*"

A TERRIBLE DEPRIVATION.—*Verses* 3—5.

The words lead us to consider a lamentable deprivation—a deprivation that comes upon the people in consequence of their heinous iniquities. Two remarks are suggested concerning this deprivation.

I. **It is a deprivation both of material and spiritual good.** First: Of *material* good. (1) A deprivation of *health.* "Every one that dwelleth therein shall languish." The physical frame loses its wonted elasticity and vigour, and succumbs to decay and depression. "Languish," like a dying man on his couch. Sin is inimical to the bodily health and vigour of men and nations; it insidiously saps the constitution. (2) A deprivation of *the means of subsistence.* "The beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away." Literally this refers to one of those droughts that occasionally occur in the East, and is ever one of the greatest calamities. What a dependent creature man is! The beasts of the field, the fowls of heaven, and the fish of the sea can do better without him, but he cannot do without them. How soon the Eternal can destroy those means of his subsistence! One hot blast of pestilential air could do the whole. It is a deprivation, secondly: Of *spiritual* good. "Let no man strive nor reprove another; for thy people are as they that strive with the priest." The meaning seems to be that their presumptuous guilt was as great as that of one who refused to obey the priest when giving judgment in the name of Jehovah, and who, according to law, for that cause was to be put to death (Deut. xvii. 12). One of the greatest spiritual blessings of mankind is the strife and reproof of godly men. The expostulations and admonitions of Christly friends, parents, teachers, what on earth is more valuable, is so essential as these? Yet these are to be taken away. "Let no man strive nor reprove another." The time comes with the sinner when God says, "My spirit shall no more strive with thee; Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone." Men have become so dog-like in nature that holy things are not to be presented to them; so swinish, that you are to cast before them no more pearls (Matt. vii. 6). **II. It is a deprivation leading to a terrible doom.** First: The destruction of *priests and people.* "Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and

the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night." The meaning is that no time, night or day, shall be free from slaughter, both of the people and the priests. This was literally true of the ten tribes at this time. And it is true in a more general and universal sense. God's law is, that "evil shall slay the wicked;" and it is always slaying them, whether they be priests or people—the laity or the clergy. If they are not true to God, day and night they are being slain. Secondly: The destruction of the *social state.* "And I will destroy thy mother." Who was the mother? The Israelitish state. And it was destroyed. England is our mother, and our mother will be destroyed unless we banish sin from our midst [*The Homilist*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

An expostulating God, ver. 1. "Hear ye the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel," &c. 1. *It is a marvellous controversy.* God might forsake, but he strives with men. Princes might hold a controversy with princes, and nations with nations, but for God to plead with his creatures is wondrous love. 2. *It is a just controversy.* There is abundant reason for it. We have broken his covenant, reproached his name, and been ungrateful for his favours. The demands of moral government, the interests of the universe, require some rectification, some settlement of matters. 3. *It is a continual controversy.* God is speaking now day by day by his word and servants, carrying on the controversy yet with the most guilty and rebellious, seeking to convince them of sin, and leave them without excuse. 4. *It is a hopeless controversy.* The sinner has no excuse, no argument or right on his side. He has sinned against light and truth, the voice of conscience and the warnings of providence. "Let them bring forth their witnesses," as I do mine, "that they may be justified" in their works and ways. "Or let them hear and say it is truth;" let them hear the arguments on my side, and say, after due consideration, if truth is not with me, and that I am perfectly reasonable in my requirements. The sinner is "speechless" now and will have no plea at the judgment day. The potsherd of the earth may strive with the potsherds, but man is unequal in strife with God. "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!"

Truth and mercy. 1. Rooted in the knowledge of God. 2. Related one to another. 3. Opposite to the five sins mentioned in verse 2, swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and incontinency. "Truth and love are mutually conditions, the one of the other. 'Truth cannot be sustained without mercy; and mercy without truth makes men negligent; so that the one ought to be mingled with the other' [*Jerome*]. They both have their roots in the knowledge of God, of which they are the fruit (Jer. xxii. 16; Isa. xi. 9); for the knowledge of God is not merely 'an acquaintance with his nature and will' [*Hitzig*], but knowledge of the love, faithfulness, and compassion of God, resting upon the experience of the heart. Such knowledge not only produces fear of God, but also love and truthfulness towards brethren (cf. Eph. iv. 32; Col. iii. 12). Where this is wanting injustice gains the upper hand" [*Keil*].

Speculative and practical knowledge are bound up together through the oneness of the relation of the soul to God, whether in its thoughts of him or acts towards him. Wrong practice corrupts belief, and misbelief corrupts practice [*Pusey*].

Priest-strivers. 1. Strife against the means of knowledge. Priests were repositories of knowledge, the oracles and guides of the people (Mal. ii. 7). 2. Strife against Divine authority. All difficult cases were taken to the priests (Deut. xvii. 8—12), who pronounced judgment, and those who refused the sentence were put to death. They represented God's authority, and spoke in God's name. 3. Strife against spiritual interests. (*a*) Even here they, priest-strivers, are often left alone. Let not

man strive with those who strive with God; reproof will only irritate and not correct them. (*b*) Hereafter they suffer the consequence of their evil ways. "To strive then with the priest was the highest contumacy, and such was their whole life and conduct. It was the character of the whole kingdom of Israel. For they had thrown off the authority of the family of Aaron which God had appointed. Their political existence was based upon the rejection of that authority. The national character influences the individual. When the whole policy is formed on disobedience and revolt, individuals will not tolerate interference. As they had rejected the priest, so would, and did, they reject the prophets. St Stephen gives it as a characteristic of the Jews, "*Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye*" [*Pusey*].

Ver. 5. When false prophets flatter and soothe the people in sin, when sinners rebel against Divine authority and reject Divine teaching, they hasten on their ruin. No degree of prosperity, no human aid, and no mere Church or State can save them from sudden, unexpected, and fearful fall. "Thou shalt fall in the day, and I will destroy thy mother."

HOMILETICS.

Ignorance of God: A Warning to the People.—*Verse* 6.

The prophet had complained that there was no knowledge of God in the land. This was a serious offence in a land of privileges and religious teachers, and an error fatal to the people. All were ignorant. The people and the priests were all to blame. In spite of warning and judgment, by the destruction of one dynasty after another, they would not desist from the sin of Jeroboam. God therefore would deprive the nation of its priestly honour, strip it of its priestly rank, and make it like a heathen nation. The words contain a warning to people and priests.

I. **Ignorance of God is inexcusable.** Israel had abundant means and opportunities of knowing God. "For did Israel not know?" and "have they not heard?" (Rom. x. 18, 19). The sound of the gospel was heard, and was sent forth like the voice of nature in all the land. The conversion of the Gentiles and the universality of Christianity were predicted; they had the oracles of God, and were highly exalted above other people. They had no excuse therefore for their unbelief. They possessed the law of God, but neglected to look into it, and forsook it. In this Israel are like many now, who, in the midst of religious ordinances, in a land of Bibles and Christian Sabbaths, disregard, neglect their salvation, and live in total ignorance of God. There is a natural distaste for spiritual things, inattention to religious duties, and an absorption in things of this world, which beget indifference and lead to unbelief. There are persons who are moral but not devout, honest but not prayerful, benevolent but not converted, amiable but not decided, nominal Christians who are not real Christians. Those who forget God are more numerous than the profligate and profane. Ignorance of God seems a small sin, but ignorance is allied with wickedness. To forget God is to exclude the essential parts of religion. It implies that his goodness, holiness, and claims are of no value to us; it is to exclude God from our thoughts and give him no place in our heart and conduct. Hence to be ignorant of God is not to love and fear him; not to live in subjection to his law, nor to aim at his glory as the chief end of life. Yet this is the real, the sad state of thousands in Christian England! II. **Ignorance of God is wilful.** "Thou hast rejected knowledge." To forget is an act of negligence; to reject is a calm, deliberate sin, a positive refusal of God's kind offers. Not the mere absence of knowledge, a deprivation of it; but a denial of it, an affected ignorance. They hated the light and loved the darkness. There is no guilt in rejecting some things, but to refuse the offers of mercy and despise

the revelations of God's love in his Son, is to sin away all mercy. "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin." Deliberately and knowingly to forsake God and the services of the sanctuary, is to make common cause with ungodly men and anti-christian synagogues. To suppress by an act of self-will your better knowledge and conviction, is to reserve yourself for future punishment and rejection. If the apostate under the Old Testament was punished with severe penalty, how much greater the punishment of the sinner against greater privileges and fuller light! "Behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it." **III. Ignorance of God is destructive.** A man may be ignorant of mathematics, astronomy, and geology, without suffering much; but to be ignorant of God, the chief and highest good, is to rob ourselves of happiness and expose ourselves to death. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." 1. *Ignorance perpetuates folly.* Ignorant men fall into temptations, seek sensual gratifications, and live in error. Knowledge is valuable for its own sake, and when rightly used, preserves from many "foolish lusts." "Be assured," says Dr Chalmers, "it is not because the people know much, that they ever become the willing subjects of any factious or unprincipled demagogue. It is just because they know too little. It is just because ignorance is the field on which the quackery of a political impostor ever reaps its most abundant harvest." 2. *Ignorance destroys present enjoyment.* The animal has all the instincts necessary to make it happy; but man's true enjoyment is in the knowledge and love of God. Human beings to fulfil their vocations must have knowledge. We are dependent for happiness upon knowledge. Every evil that curses mankind is connected with ignorance. Hence knowledge is *light.* Ignorance is a blind guide, and its results are often more fearful than the cause itself. Exclude knowledge from the mind, you turn it into a world of darkness, and rob it of its native element. Thus driven from light, no brilliant genius, no flashes of fancy, can enlighten it. These will scathe like the lightning, rather than bless and cheer, and leave the gloom more horrible. Knowledge is *life and health.* "That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good." The words of God are the health and life of the soul. "They are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh." Wisdom is the indispensable condition of physical and spiritual health. It promotes temperance, and gives self-restraint. It teaches submission to the Divine will, and leads to the emancipation of our noblest powers and capacities. It secures the fullest and freest development of body and mind in personal life and activity for God. Ignorance is sickness, decay, and death. Knowledge unites to God, but ignorance cuts off from God. "My people are *cut off* for lack of knowledge" Cut off from the source of life and enjoyment, like a branch lopped off from the tree. Man cannot bear fruit of himself, hence he will perish if not united to God in knowledge and faith. 3. *Ignorance destroys future happiness.* Eternal life is suspended in knowledge, for men "perish for lack of knowledge." On the other hand, "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Knowledge of all kinds is the proper wealth of our rational nature: but to captivate us with the knowledge of God, it is set forth as the only wealth worth possessing—the only science which conducts to life. And this life not mere unending existence, but growing knowledge and conformity to Christ. Religion on earth consists in the knowledge of God, and blessedness in heaven consists in the vision of God. Well may we pray with Professor Hall, "O Lord, remove our ignorance, that we may know thee; our idleness, that we may seek thee; our unbelief, that we may find and enjoy thee."

Ignorance of God: A Warning to the Priests.

I. Priests blamed for the ignorance of the people. They were appointed to teach and warn the people; but were unfaithful to their trust, and suffered the

nation to sin. 1. *They neglected study.* "Thou hast rejected knowledge." They had the means, but did not improve them. They had the law, but did not read it. The preacher should be wise and teach the people knowledge (Ecc. xii. 9); should study to make provision for their wants (Matt. xiii. 52); and make full proof of his ministry. But an idle, ignorant minister, is a disgrace to the community, and a curse to the Church. 2. *They lived inconsistent lives.* They professed to belong to God, but worshipped the calves of Jeroboam. Through poverty, fear, or shame, they withheld, suppressed the truth, and connived at the nation's sin. They shared in the rejection of God's truth, and brought themselves under God's curse. "I will also reject thee." **II. Priests punished for the ignorance of the people.** It was their duty to remove it, but they encouraged it to answer their own selfish ends. Hence they were guilty, partook of the sins of the people, and were deprived of their honour. 1. *They were cast out of office themselves.* "Thou shalt be no priest to me." Sad fall! God will not retain idle and ungodly men in office. Those that have no love for Christ and immortal souls, will have no love for their work, and display no activity in it. "Consider this," says Bishop Taylor, "which is a great truth—that every degree of love to the world is so much taken from the love of God." "Take heed unto thyself," lest thou miscarry and become a castaway. 2. *They deprived their posterity of honour.* "I will also forget thy children." What will the rising generation be without the means of knowing and loving God? What will the nation become when its "candlestick is removed out of its place"? It is sad to be forgotten of God. The sun does not shine on more wretched creatures than on the awful masses of our fellow-creatures growing up in ignorance and estrangement from God. "Where there is no vision, the people perish." God only knows how far the ministers of his word are the cause of this destruction. "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand" (Ezek. iii. 18; cf. Ps. li. 14; Acts xx. 26).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Rejecting knowledge. Proves—1. A wrong spirit: (*a*) hating to be taught, (*b*) despising the teacher, (*c*) resolved to sin. 2. A mournful indication: (*a*) pride, (*b*) contempt of God, (*c*) indifference to truth. 3. A fatal result: (*a*) deadness of conscience, (*b*) unbelief of heart, (*c*) utter rejection of God.

Forgetting God. 1. The course, forgetting his love and goodness, word and power, justice and grace. 2. The result: (*a*) awful, (*b*) unexpected, (*c*) universal, (*d*) inevitable. "Ignorance is so far from being the mother of devotion, that it is the mother of destruction; lack of knowledge is ruining to any person or people [*Matt. Henry*]."

Parents who are careless as to themselves, as to their own lives, as to their own shame even, still long that their children should not be as themselves. God tries to touch their hearts where they are least steeled against him. He says not *I will forget thee*, but I will forget those nearest thy heart, *thy children* [*Pusey*].

It is the righteous judgment of God upon negligent parents and unfaithful ministers, to requite their children, for their treatment to his. "I will also forget thy children." Parents cannot do wrong without injuring their children. Ministers cannot neglect their duty without robbing their people. The iniquities of the fathers and teachers shall be visited on their children.

HOMILETICS.

THE DANGER OF WORLDLY PROSPERITY.—*Verses* 7—9.

The increase may refer to number, or wealth, power, and dignity. Israel had grown into a strong and powerful nation, but increase of greatness was attended

with increase of sin. Its prosperity was attributed to idols (ii. 7), thought to be the fruit of their worship, and strengthened them in their delusion. God would therefore turn their glory into shame and make them a warning to others.

I. **In worldly prosperity men forget God.** The standard of revolt was erected in the first sin. The history of man since has been an endeavour to build an empire, governed by laws and replenished with resources, independent of God. Having by apostasy cut himself off from the true God, he has joined himself to idols, or in his own sufficiency deified himself and made himself his own first and last, all in all. 1. *God is not recognized.* The gifts are received with ingratitude or attributed to human skill and effort. God is shut out entirely from men's thoughts and business. When men do not fear, they sink into utter forgetfulness of God, into practical atheism. "Because they have left off to take to the Lord," ver. 10. 2. *God is forsaken.* "As they were increased so they sinned against me." It is easy to forsake God when once he is forgotten. Worldlings make their prosperity minister to their pride and ingratitude. Increase of wealth occasions increase of pomp "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked, then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation." An abundant population begets haughty self-reliance, and tempts nations to war. Riches and wealth are not evil in themselves. Nor is the mere possession of them wrong. In almost every stage of civilization they procure the necessities and conveniences of life, and may be made the means of doing good. But to desire them for their own sake, to put them in the place of the highest good, and to let them beget a rapacious worldly spirit, is to abuse them and sin against God. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." II. **In worldly prosperity men become covetous.** "They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity." The priests made a gain of the sins of the people. They encouraged idolatry, which involved desertion of God, and connived at sinful customs. The more the people sinned, the more sin-offerings were presented. Their fees and support were derived from the calf worship. They set their heart, *i. e.* their longing desire, upon their iniquity, had an interest in its growth, and did all in their power to uphold and increase it. 1. *False religionists feed upon sin.* Religious teachers are most assuming in their authority and dictatorial in their conduct. They feed upon the ignorance and are worshipped by the superstitions of the people. Servility and flattery exalt them and puff them up with pride A train of followers, a multitude of dependants, look up to them when they go out and when they come in. "Self, is Dives in the mansion, clothed in purple, and faring sumptuously every day—the cause of Christ, is Lazarus lying at his gate, and fed only with the crumbs which fall from his table." Religious professors are satisfied with forms and ceremonies, anxious for the reputation without performing the duties of Christians, and feed upon merit, not upon Christ. They turn religion into traffic, and "suppose that gain is godliness." 2. *Covetous men feed upon sin* Every passion seeks to justify itself, but covetousness is defended and espoused by all the passions. Covetousness was manifest in the first transgression, and has maintained a fatal ascendency ever since. It turned the nations of old into rapacity, arrogance, and pride, which braved the very throne of God. Alas! it changes the priests and ministers of God into mercenary hirelings, "The heads of Zion judge for reward, and the prophets therefore divine for money." All covetous men seek to feed, to support themselves, by fraud and deceit; by worldly lusts and pleasure; by idolatry and selfishness "The covetous man lives as if the world was made altogether for him," says South, "and not he for the world; to take in everything and part with nothing." Worldly men have perverted spiritual appetites, relish only inferior and sinful pursuits, and feed upon ashes (Is. xl. 20). III. **In worldly prosperity men are ruined.** "I will punish them for their ways." "Therefore will I change their glory into shame." Sin brings its own punishment. The very objects which excite it form a rod for its chastisement. God is perpetually remind

ing men that pursuit of worldly good is attended with great anxiety and exhausting toil—that its possession is often a mortification and its loss an anguish—that it is dangerous and destructive, leading men "into temptation and a snare, and piercing them through with many sorrows." 1. *Ruin instead of glory.* I will change their glory into shame. God overrules the purposes and pursuits of men. They reap what they do not sow, and are rewarded with the opposite of what they anticipate. God can strip worldly prosperity of all its glory, turn the ornaments of character, and the acquisitions of fortune, into a curse instead of a blessing. 2. *Glory the means of ruin.* Beauty is often the cause of pride. Pride and a haughty spirit come before a fall. Ambition, power, and population drive nations to war and destruction. "Ambition overleaps itself, and falls on the contrary side." Amaziah would take no warning, lost his own wealth, and wasted the treasures in God's temple, and the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, and the city exposed to shame and contempt (2 Kings xiv. 10). 3. *Ruin upon all the people.* "Like people, like priest." Priest and people were alike in sin and must suffer in punishment. "As with the people, so with the priest" (Is. xxiv. 2). Prosperity would not exempt the one, nor sanctity secure the other. None would escape, all must be carried away into disgrace and death. The people shelter themselves under the example of the priest: and the priest excuses himself by the power of number, the weakness of our nature, and the strength of temptation; but God "will punish them for their ways." The wicked may prosper and rule for a while; but God will visit them. They act foolishly by turning God's mercies to their own destruction, and because they prosper confirm themselves in their folly. Their fame will become infamous, their disgrace conspicuous, and their "*shame will be their promotion*" (Prov. iii. 35). "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

A just retribution: if we turn God's glory into shame by idolatry (Ps. cvi. 20; Jer. ii. 2; Rom. i. 23; Phil. iii. 19); God will take away glory and give us our shame. "Such is the course of sin and chastisement. God bestows on man gifts, which may be to him matter of praise and glory, if only ordered aright to their highest and only true end, the glory of God; man perverts them to vain glory and thereby to sin; God turns the gifts, so abused, to shame" [*Pusey*].

In our own days Christian ministers and Christian laymen, from fear of man and love of popularity, shrink from denouncing the fashionable sins and follies of all classes, the spurious liberalism in religion, the equivocal amusements, luxury, absence of modesty in apparel, and covetousness, so prevalent. Ministers conniving at the corrupt ways of the people, and the people screening their sin behind the worldliness of ministers, are both alike in guilt, and shall therefore be also alike in punishment. God will make their sin their punishment; their own presumptuous doings shall be their reward [*Fausset*].

Like priests like people. 1. Like in moral character—good or bad. 2. Like in moral conduct—consistent or inconsistent. 3. Like in moral destiny—saved or lost. "Let your life be a commentary on your sermons" [*Lamont*]. "The life of a pious clergyman is visible rhetoric" [*Hooker*].

> "When nations are to perish in their sins,
> 'Tis in the Church the leprosy begins."
> [*Cowper.*]

HOMILETICS.

SINFUL INDULGENCES.—*Verses* 10—14.

God will visit the priests for their presumptuous sins. Those who eat up greedily the sin of the people shall receive neither enjoyment nor sustenance. Insatiable desire is its own tormentor. Sensual indulgence can never satisfy the cravings of

the soul. "Ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink."

I. Sensual indulgences do not satisfy our wants. "For they shall eat and not have enough." The food of the priests did not nourish their bodies, nor satisfy their greedy appetites. Sinful desires are never satisfied. The more they are gratified the more intensely do they crave, and cry, like the horse-leech, "Give, give." Every indulgence creates the appetite. Men seek happiness in created good, and are wretched because they do not find it. God made man upright, with a healthy spiritual appetite, that sought its support and fruition in him. But deceived by sin, man sought out many inventions, prepared many idols, and substituted many pleasures for God, which cannot appease his hunger. The debaucheries of drunkenness, gluttony, and lust, are husks only fit for swine. The cares and toils of sin, the pursuit of wealth and honour, of fame and fashion, indicate the disease, but give no satisfaction to the soul. Even amid the surfeits of earth's richest feasts men cry, "Who will show us any good?" Charles the Fifth, after a life spent in military pursuits and the active, energetic prosecution of ambitious designs, resigned his crown sated with its enjoyment. The poet Campbell, who sung in early youth "The Pleasures of Hope," in the evening of life said to a circle of friends, "As for fame, it is a bubble that must soon burst. Earned for others, shared with others, it was sweet; but, at my age, to my own solitary experience, it is bitter. Left in my chamber alone with myself, is it wonderful my philosophy at times takes fright;-that I rush into company; resort to that which blunts but heals no pang; and then, sick of the world, and dissatisfied with myself, shrink back into solitude?" They spend their lives and waste their substance in that which disappoints; "confessing all the time," says a writer, "that they fail even when in form they succeed, and showing by their symptoms of disappointment and dissatisfaction that their objects, whether gained or lost, have no relation to their wants." Nothing can satisfy the immortal soul that is not adapted to its nature and constitution. The enjoyment must be lasting and real, but the pleasures of sin are short-lived and only "for a season." They gratify and excite, but never satisfy the mind. Our thirst dries up all earthly things, and our hunger craves for fuller joys than sensual indulgences. We must go out of ourselves, beyond the things of sense, and feed on God, the only good.. **II. Sensual indulgences are pursued by unlawful means.** "They shall commit whoredom and shall not increase." 1. *They are increased by sinful methods.* Whoredom was not the way to increase their offspring. Children are a heritage from God. Polygamy is against the law of God and the welfare of humanity. The fruit of illicit intercourse God will turn to decay. Those who seek to increase in their families, to prosper in their business, and secure worldly wealth, by unlawful means, fight against God. Dishonest ways can never prosper. Nothing can succeed without God. He can desert the means or curse the issue. "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing (Prov. x. 2), ill-gotten gains are a dangerous and uncertain possession (xiii. 11; xxi. 6); and the wages of unrighteousness will be the reward of those who follow ways of covetousness and sin." 2. *They are sought in forgetfulness of God.* "They have left off to take heed to the Lord." Once they regarded God's authority and law, but now they take no heed at all. God is neither acknowledged in worship nor discerned in providence. They live in total forgetfulness and disregard. Men should "take heed," look to God, "as the eyes of servants look unto the hands of their masters," for support, direction, and duty. But when the eye is fixed on lower objects, and the heart centred on sinful pursuits, God is forgotten and forsaken. The lawless and hopeless ways of men spring from disregard to God and neglect of his word. When the eye ceases to watch God, they fall into error, wander amid the pomps, and vanities, and lusts of the world. "Show me what thou truly lovest," says Fichte, "show me what thou seekest and strivest for with thy whole heart, when thou hopest to attain to true enjoyment, and thou hast hereby shown me thy life.

What thou lovest is that thou livest. This very love is thy life, thy root, the seal, the central point of thy being." III. Sensual indulgences injure the spiritual nature. They were so attached to whoredom and wine that they seemed to have lost all sense of moral duty and religious obligation, and given themselves up to "work all manner of sin even with greediness." 1. *Sensual indulgences darken the understanding.* They "take away the heart" from God their Benefactor. Sinful passions brutalize men, and "a brutish man knoweth not." The unbelieving heart does not know nor understand God and his word. Men may parade their intellect, and boast of their gifts, but estrangement from God degrades their condition, and sinks them in the rank of being. If we have no sanctified principle within us, we look at God's works, interpret God's ways, and receive God's blessing, just like the beasts of the field. We extract no useful and spiritual thoughts from them. We are content with the natural use, nay, we degrade the natural use of things. Vain imaginations darken the foolish heart (Rom. i. 22). When the light and life of God have departed from the soul, when the wicked have cast out the knowledge of God, God will give "them over to a reprobate mind;" a mind void of judgment and perception, weakened in power to apprehend and approve of the truth and goodness of God (Rom. i. 28). When once sinful indulgence darkens the mind, it becomes stupid, and its active powers are suffered to sleep in stupidity. Men could not preserve the truth and philosophy, could not retain the knowledge of God, without moral aid. Habits of sense and sin, of indulgence and passion, destroy the perception of the mind and blunt the understanding. Sensual life impairs and paralyzes the intuitive powers and bedims the judgment. What a sad picture to see the decay of knowledge, to see the moral sense extinguished in man, the king and lord, the minister and interpreter, of nature! It is melancholy to see the fair creation, which God pronounced good, poisoned and cursed by disease and death. But to make religion degenerate into idolatry, to pervert the moral instincts of our nature, and confound by evil habits and constant crimes the distinction between right and wrong, light and darkness, is sad beyond degree! "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" 2. *Sensual indulgences deaden the affections.* Man is a creature of appetites and instinctive desires, in common with the mere animal. If he were nothing more, he would be innocent in the abandonment of himself to their gratification. But they need controlling, lest his higher interests be endangered—his instincts and affections must be subordinated to a sense of duty and the love of God. If the sensuous predominate over the spiritual, and self-indulgence and self-gratification become the law of life, then his nobler feelings are crushed and his affections vitiated. "Fleshly lusts" war against the soul, the very centre and citadel of man's nature. The "divers lusts and pleasures," to which natural man is a slave, are dishonourable to the Christian and perilous to all. They disturb the peace of the soul by corroding care and by the tumult of passion—they darken its vision, and taint its powers with corruption—they threaten its life, and intercept its communication with God and spiritual influences. To be carnally-minded is death. In spiritual death men are "past feeling" and beyond the charms of life. The conscience is stifled, the heart hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and they are left without moral sense, and shame, and hope. 3. *Sensual indulgences debase the moral nature.* Every created object expresses some thought, some quality of the Divine nature. The moral character of God was revealed in the moral nature of man. "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him," in knowledge and true holiness. "Man," says Clement, "is the most beautiful hymn to the praise of the Deity." Divine properties in him were incarnated and humanized, and lodged in him were principles before at large. He was "crowned with glory and honour." But he voluntarily broke away from God, deranged the harmony of his moral nature, disturbed the peace of the universe, and exposed himself to death. Sin has defaced God's image, and man has lost his original

righteousness. The understanding is blinded by ignorance and prejudice. The heart is alienated from God by wicked works. The affections are disordered, and the desires corrupted. Man is now subject to sense and a slave to sin. He defiles himself by the filthiness of the flesh, and deforms himself by sensual indulgence. Luxury and lusts bind the will and make him unable and indisposed to restore himself. He has become the sport and prey of his passions. There is a tendency to animalism, and an immortal being is compelled to ride on the back of lusts and "presumptuous sins." There is a loss of the consciousness of God and a forgetfulness of the presence of God. The supernatural tie is broken, and man wanders into error and lives in earthly, sensual, and devilish sins. Any idol debases the moral nature, and changes the glory which distinguishes man "into the similitude of an ox" (Ps. cvi. 20). **IV. Sensual indulgences are oftenconnected with superstition.** "My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them." It was a sad fall for the people of the living God to consult a heathen staff and say to mere wood, My father (Jer. ii. 27). But the descent is easy and gradual. There is a tendency in man to depart from God, to acquire and foster false ideas of God, even in the midst of the clearest indications of his existence and the tenderest reasons for clinging to him. Guilt, fear, and despair isolate the soul and turn it from God—make it drop, and cut it off as a plant from the light of the sun. Then we approach God in terror. We create gods of our own fancy, philosophy, and early prepossessions. "Fear made the gods," says a heathen writer. It is certain that superstition, polytheism, and atheism are only the counterpart and exponent of the moral condition of nations. Our nature is religious, and the corrupt heart will produce gods like itself. The philosopher contemplates nature, rejects a personal God, and becomes a pantheist. The wicked wishes there to be no God; governed by his wishes, and led to believe against all moral evidence, he says there is no God, and becomes an atheist. The ignorant multitude, dreading God, become superstitious, and foster and express their religious feeling in figurative representations "made by art and man's device." Men associate their notions of Deity with the palpable realities by which they are surrounded, and in every light of heaven and every element of nature they behold the presence of a presiding power. The grove and the mountain, the valley and the stream, have been peopled with divinities. The pride of monarchs and the ambition of heroes, the veneration of priests and the licentiousness of people, have swelled the catalogue of gods. In Egypt and Assyria, in Greece and Rome, in their palmiest days, idolatry was supported by the deepest principles, the most violent passions, and the most obvious interest of legislator and prince, sculptor and poet. Originating in the depraved propensities of fallen nature, depending upon their activity for existence and support, it afforded a patron for every vice, a plea for every cruelty; it consecrated every lust and sanctioned every crime. Its terrible effects are written in the destruction of institutions, the corruption of morals, and the doom of nations. Modern civilization fares no better. If men do not consult blocks of wood and stone, they kneel before statues and pictures, endow human conceptions with the attributes of Divinity, and set the creature on the throne of the Creator. We have Ritualism and Romanism, priestcraft and priesthood, sacrifice and offering, with their deadly evils. The mind is filled with narrow conceptions, the eyes are habituated to artistic nullities, and the morals are polluted by gross caricatures and sensuous worship. In the bosom of the Christian Church untaught myriads are sinking into modern heathenism, and believe "the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone." We have material idolatry and superstition in the present day. The gods of sensualism are represented by lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God—by those who seek enjoyment in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. The worshippers of the golden calf bow down to riches and worldly success. Devotees of literature and science deify Nature and turn her into a temple of adoration. Worldliness, idolatry, and superstition, in their most refined and

plausible forms, vitiate our conceptions of God, lower the standard of morality, wounds society at its core, and spread dire results in families and nations. They have breathed pestilence in the ordinances of the Christian Church—corrupting their simplicity, polluting their sanctity, and tarnishing their glory. Though upheld by the traditions of antiquity, the suggestions of expediency, or the dictates of human authority, they entice, deceive, debase, and are rebellious against the authority, the absolute and sole right of God to claim our homage. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath." V. **Sensual indulgences affect posterity.** "Therefore the people that doth not understand shall fall." Sin and suffering are inseparable. The moral order of the universe must dissolve and perish before a breach of God's law can bring anything but evil and distress. Under the moral government of God, the consequences of an act do not pass away with the transgressor. We are taught to calculate upon remote results, impressed with our responsibility and aided in duty. The Jews were commanded to obey God—taught that obedience would secure, and disobedience would forfeit, their privileges to their posterity, and reminded that the principle of involving their children in the temporal condition of the fathers was a just and merciful provision. Religion appeals to the strongest instincts of our nature, guards its purity by enlisting the affection of parents for their offspring, and grafting on that affection a salutary fear of the visitations of God. 1. *By the influence of example sensual indulgence affects posterity.* "Therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery." Children naturally imitate, do as you do, not as you say, and "catch the infection" of parents. Hence a wise man speaks of his children as his "future state." According to example, will this future be good or evil, a success or a failure. If parents drink and swear, neglect the house and forsake the service of God, will their children walk in any other way? If fathers and mothers are spendthrifts, pleasure-seekers, and indulgent in vice, their children will follow their steps, and God recompenses parents in their children. The child copies the foibles of the father and pleases him; he copies his vices and punishes him. Men may love their sins, but they will be alarmed when they see them in their posterity. Antipathies are imbibed, reproduced, and intensified. Lusts are bred and born, and bring forth death in the rising generation. In the French Revolution, the children amused themselves by killing birds and small animals with little guillotines. This was the natural result of what they had seen. Children live again the lives of their parents, act their deeds, and are rewarded or punished by their example. "God layeth up his iniquity for his children." 2. *By a natural law sensual indulgence affects posterity.* Parents and children, the present and the future generation, are bound together not by accidental circumstances, but by organic unity. The existing generation is giving the impress of its character to the one that is to follow it. No man liveth unto himself. Every action in this life is the beginning of a chain of results, the end of which cannot be seen. As in the natural, so in the moral world, there is a "conservation of force." Example is contagious. Men beneficially or perniciously influence others, raise them up or bring them down to their own standard of morality. Good and evil are diffusive, and seeds of conduct ripen and reappear in the life of others. "That which is born of evil begets evil," says Ruskin, "and that which is born of valour and honour teaches valour and honour." The sensualist and the sabbath-breaker, the drunkard and the glutton, are spreading "the savour of death unto death!" The wicked and licentious are influencing the morals of those around them. The health and happiness, the honour and the degradation, of posterity are in the power of the present. When children are "born thieves," or "born liars," their parents and progenitors are to blame. Drunkards beget drunkards; dishonesty and lusts are hereditary vices. Sensual and vicious parents beget sensual and vicious children. Diseased parents transmit weakened constitutions and diseased tendencies to their offspring

Thus "the evil that men do," as well as the good they do, "lives after them." The law of influence is a continuous, ever-increasing power, working consequences to the end of time. "Thou recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 10. *Take heed to the Lord.* 1. God the object of love, regard, and life. 2. When men do not take heed, disregard God, they fall into sin, wander into the vanities and lusts of the world. 3. Culpable neglect of God, persisted in, is lawless and hopeless, involves the loss of blessing, and ruin. "As the true cause of all men's departure is their not serious minding of God, that they might observe and love him, so where this neglect is he cares not for external form and performance, and especially is he provoked when men make apostasy from better things to this temper, for it is challenged as the root of their miscarriage and God's judgments, because they have left off," &c. [*Hutcheson*].

Ver. 11. *The Triple Association.* Whoredom, voluptuousness, and drunkenness—their influence upon individuals, families, and societies. "As it is God's judgment on unfaithful ministers and people that they are given up to sensuality, so that will soon besot them and make them sapless in their doctrine and careless in their duty" [*Hutcheson*].

The Threefold Apostasy. 1. By whoredom, or illicit worship rendered to heathen gods by the chosen people. This worship was spiritual fornication, and by it their hearts were captivated, taken away from that exclusive trust and allegiance which they owed to God, their covenant King. 2. By *yayin*, wine—the type of sensual gratification—their hearts had been taken away from supreme affection to God, their Divine Redeemer and Benefactor. 3. By *tirosh*, the fruit of the vine—the type of natural earthly good—their hearts had been captivated from God, the infinite goodness and Fountain of spiritual joy. This was the apostasy of which the children of Abraham had been guilty; they went after strange gods instead of the true God; their best affections centred in sensual pleasures, instead of being fixed upon the Divine love; and their estimate of good was limited to earthly things (represented by *tirosh*, one of the most delicious of natural elements), instead of embracing him "from whom all blessings flow." Or taking the ascending scale, their *understanding* was darkened, for they esteemed temporal good above the Giver of eternal good; their *affections* were sensualized, by being exclusively engaged with animal delights; and *their spiritual nature* was debased, by being prostrated before stupid idols [*Temp. Commentary*].

Ver. 12. *Idolatry* does not consist merely in calling upon idols, but also in trust in our own righteousness, works, and service, in riches and human influence and power. And this, as it is the most common, is also the most harmful idolatry [*Luther*].

Idolatry never stands alone. All the sins of Israel were centred in it. By association even good was magnetized with evil, and confirmed it. In heathen nations it is connected with cruel and barbarous rites—in modern times, lasciviousness and intemperance, with all their attendant evils, follow in its train.

Ver. 13, 14. When men forsake God, mark the steps of degradation. 1. They worship sticks and stocks, inferior creatures. 2. They seek *counsel* and direction from them, and take any allusion for response. 3. They set up human ordinances for Divine, the creature for the Creator, and consecrate *mountains* and *hills*, groves and valleys, as temples of superstition. 4. They forsake God's direction, go from under his providence and protection. God will not accept any but spiritual worship, and all who forsake him shall perish. 5. They bring ruin upon themselves. "*The people that doth not understand shall fall*," and be confounded (Prov. x. 8, 10). "Ignorance which

we might avoid or cure, if we would, is itself a sin. It cannot excuse sin. They shall, he says, *fall* or be *cast headlong*. Those who blind their eyes, so as not to see or understand God's will, bring themselves to sudden ruin, which they hide from themselves, until they fall headlong in it" [*Pusey*].

The sins of the fathers descend very often to the children, both in the way of nature, that the children inherit strong temptations to their parents' sin, and by way of example, that they greedily imitate, often exaggerate them. Wouldest thou not have children which thou wouldest wish unborn, reform thyself [*Pusey*].

HOMILETICS.

The Doom of some a Warning to others.—*Verses* 15—17.

A different turn is now given to the prophecy. Israel had sinned, would not heed, and must be punished; but Judah, who had the law and the temple of God, ought not to prove so stubborn and incorrigible. God specially warns his own, and if *they* sin their condemnation will be greater. The idea is that we must not partake of other men's sins lest we share in their punishment.

I. The provoking sin. Israel had played the harlot, backslided from God, and continued in idolatry, heedless of Divine warning and judgment. 1. *Israel were guilty of idolatry.* They knew Jehovah, but set up idols. They had made graven images and worshipped golden calves in opposition to God's command. They did not intend to worship the images themselves, but God through the images. One step led to another in the corrupting practices. Papists and Ritualists spring from ranks which some would call earnest and devout. Men make gods, honour and serve them, and fall into gross superstitions and idolatry. The proneness of the Jews to polytheism is instructive to us. Churches favoured with the purest worship, nations enriched with the oracles of God, individuals privileged with means of grace, may fall into formalism, perfect apathy in religion, and undue veneration of the creature. Formalism, corrupt worship, and entire abandonment of God are the steps which lead to idolatry. God has real claims upon all his creatures. "Thou shalt have no other gods but *Me*." Obedience to his law is not merely an integral part of true morality, but essential to all religion. Regard to him, therefore, is our first and highest duty. Disregard to God accounts for idolatry in all its forms, for moral evil in all its features. 2. *Israel were guilty of neglecting Divine warnings.* They listened not to the prophets. Servant after servant was sent by God, but all to no purpose. They despised the message, and persecuted the messenger. A person unwarned may have some excuse; but "forewarned, forearmed," yet Israel repented not nor turned from danger. Many sit under the sound of the gospel, but take no heed. If you despise exhortations, warnings, and reproofs, neglect privileges which exalt you to heaven, how can you escape at last? You incur sevenfold guilt by such conduct. Continuance in sin after Divine admonition will provoke God to anger. "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." 3. *Israel were guilty of despising Divine chastisements.* God not only warns, but chastises the sinner to wean him from his sins. Personal health fails, business prospects fade away, and family circumstances change, but prayer is not made to the God of our life, and comfort is not sought in him (Ps. xlii. 8). Grievous sickness, personal and domestic troubles, do not convert men, nor turn them from the error of their ways. Trials ought to make us think, they are the strokes of a loving hand, designed to purify our hearts and lives. The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without affliction. "Sweet indeed" should be "the uses of adversity," but they often fail to correct. They do not remind of neglected duty, nor separate the sinner from his sin. Pharaoh, Jehoram, and the Jews, are solemn warnings. "O God, I have made an ill use of thy mercies," says Bp Hall, "if I have not learnt to be content with thy correction."

The intractable ox resisting the yoke is an apt image of the impenitent casting off Divine restraints. Conviction follows upon conviction, chastening upon chastening, still he rebels, hardens his neck, and invites threatened judgments. Ahab would not be corrected, and "the bow drawn at a venture" performed its mission. Pharaoh grew more stubborn under the rod, and madly rushed to ruin. "If men will harden their hearts, God will harden his hand," says Howe. Unheeded reproof ripens us for judgment. "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." **II. The fearful doom.** "The Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place." Scatter them into exile and expose them to danger, as a lamb becomes the prey to wild beasts. And this "*now*." The judgment is immediate and at hand, no longer delayed "Ephraim is joined to idols," in love with his sins; "let him alone," let him rest from further correction and expostulation, and take the consequences of his folly. This is the last and most hopeless state of guilt. 1. *Let alone by man.* The godly must not reprove nor exhort some men. They feel on account of the sins, and are deeply anxious for the welfare, of their fellow-creatures. But there are sins beyond hope, total apostasy and final impenitence. "There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it." Apostasy and idolatry are not only sins against God, but destructive to men. The intercession of Moses and Samuel would not avail (Jer. xv. 1), when God is angry. "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me; for I will not hear thee." 2. *Let alone by God.* It is sad to be without the sympathy and prayers of men; but to be left of God is a most awful condition. It is something more than being without the warnings of the minister, and the exhortations of a mother or friend. One let alone is not troubled with the power of truth, the checks of conscience, and the restraints of providence. He is undisturbed and unfettered in his course of sin. He goes from bad to worse, and his end is destruction. Like the adder, he cannot and will not hear the wisest charmer. The will is averse, the purpose is fixed, and the ear is deaf. As stones fall to the ground, sparks fly upward, and rivers roll to the ocean, so silly men run from God, and beyond the reach of mercy. "The soul that sinneth presumptuously shall have no atonement; it shall be cut off from the midst of my people." 3. *Let alone without any pity and protection.* "As a lamb in a large place." A lamb exposed to peril is a most helpless and pitiable creature. What more lamentable to behold than the sinner let alone, exposed to temptation and death. This made Christ weep over the guilty city, and Paul wish that he was accursed for his kindred in the flesh. "The large place" of Israel were the territories of the Medes, where they were deprived of temple worship, prophetic teaching, and Divine protection. The large place of the sinner is the broadway to destruction; to places where strong drink drowns reason and conscience; where sensibility is consumed by burning passions; where tender memories are quenched, conscience benumbed, and every noble feeling destroyed. The man who ruins his health and his happiness, his circumstances and his life, and who implicates his family and his fellow-creatures by the unbridled gratification of sense, is to be pitied for his folly. Woe to that man who has forsaken Christ, and whom God permits to go the downward road, unpitied, unprotected, and unsaved! **III. The kindly warning.** "Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend." Israel and Judah were at variance, and such warm sympathy could not be expected from those at enmity with each other. But the heart of the prophet beats warmly for Judah, who alone represented the people of God. God is anxious to preserve Judah from the ways of Israel. Spiritual, theocratic feelings are stronger than natural feelings, and must prevail. Christianity is not insensible to private friendship and the claims of kindred; but it kindles within us the fire of universal benevolence. 1. *A needful warning.* (*a*) *Proximity to Israel endangered Judah.* Temptations are near, friends and neighbours entice, and the Christian is in danger of conforming to the world. Like a

rebellious province, the world has customs, statutes, and pursuits, contrary to the law of God. Friendship with it is forbidden. Its pomp and vanities must be renounced. We must "come out from the world, and be separate," that is, be Christians wholly or not at all. (*b*) *The mixture of idolatry with the worship of God endangered Judah.* "Come not ye unto Gilgal," &c. Gilgal and Bethaven were places of note and great resort. Here people were accustomed to "swear the Lord liveth," or associate the living God with idols. Formulas of Christian worship were employed to justify the service of idols. Man will worship something. When the worship of Jehovah is forsaken then the devices of man are chosen. Examples and places infect. God will not divide his claims with idols. Superstitions are not more warranted or imitable because they are practised under the pretence of serving God. Aaron's golden calf was no excuse for the neglect of Jehovah. We must have no halting, no mixture in religion. Either Baal or the Lord must be our master and God. We cannot serve two masters. To swear by idols, by heaven or earth, or any creature, dishonours our nature, offends our God, and makes us a warning to others. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." 2. *A timely warning.* God warns before he strikes. Spaces for repentance are given men, and they are urged to flee from the judgment before it is too late. Though Israel is given up, yet Judah must be cautioned. This indicates Divine wisdom, love, and forbearance. "Sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily." "The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." Provocations are given, yet God forbears to punish. But we must not question his providence, disregard his word, and abuse his mercy There is clear and constant warning. The impenitent are without excuse, and the punishment will be complete. Punishment lingers long, but falls heavily at last. "Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him." 3. *A reasonable warning.* Let not Judah offend, "though Israel *play the harlot.*" The separation of Israel from Judah was most unrighteous and disastrous in its results on both kingdoms; but Israel's departure from God was most aggravating and hazardous. It was harlotry and wantonness. God's service is a reasonable service, in harmony with our mental and moral constitution. God is no hard task-master, demanding impossibilities and requiring bricks without straw. "His commandments are not grievous." He treats men as rational and responsible beings, beseeching them to repent, and warning them of the consequences of neglect.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 15. Places of good reputation become infamous, lose all honour, by connection with idolatry and immorality. *Bethel*, the house of God, becomes *Beth-aven*, the house of idols, the house of vanity. Places consecrated by the piety of our forefathers and the mercy of God are turned into scenes of corruption and vice. We are forbidden to go to such places lest we should be infected. Christians must not sanction worldly customs and amusements in which God has no place. Abstain from the very appearance of evil.

Ver. 16. The sinner, like Israel, is often fretful under Divine restraint, impatient in the narrowness of God's ways, and is bent on backsliding; but when God lets him alone, gives him his wish, liberty brings no security and happiness, like a lamb bleating alone, bewraying its solitude, and he wanders about to destruction. How much better to be in God's fold, daily fed, and led into green pastures, and beside the still waters!

Ver. 17. "*Ephraim is joined*," &c. I. The Alliance.—1. Unholy. 2. Ruinous. II. The Abandonment.—1. Just. 2. Severe. 3. Hopeless. "A man may be given up to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the soul may be saved; but to be given up to sin is a thousand times worse, because that is the fruit of Divine anger, in order to the damnation of the soul" [*John Shower*]. Ah, Lord! this mercy I humbly beg, that whatever

thou givest me up to, thou wilt not give me up to the ways of mine own heart; if thou wilt give me up to be afflicted, or tempted, or reproached, &c., I will patiently sit down and say, "It is the Lord; let him do with me what seems good in his own eyes." Do anything with me, lay what burden thou wilt upon me, so that thou dost not give me up to the ways of my own heart [*Brooks*]. Deliver me, O Lord, from that evil man, myself [*Augustine*].

HOMILETICS.

THE BITTERNESS AND THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN.—*Verses* 18, 19

In these verses we have another triplet of vice. The people are guilty of intemperance and adultery. The princes and leaders are covetous, pervert justice, and cry, "Give, give." The whole nation had become sapless and corrupt. "*Drink*" is here put for the effect of sweet intoxicating wine. As sourness was opposed to sweetness, so sin is opposed to holiness and idolatry to the service of God. The verses set forth the bitterness and the punishment of sin.

I. The Bitterness of Sin. "Their drink is sour," their delights are insipid and dead. Man's spiritual appetite is strong, and God has made abundant provision for our happiness. But men indulge in sin, are not satisfied with healthful refreshment, and "add drunkenness to thirst." The appetite, cloyed with indulgence, turns with disgust from the sweetest dainties, while "every bitter thing is sweet" to the hungry soul (Prov. xxvii. 7). So in spiritual things. The sinner has no relish, and feels no need for the bread of life. He seeks to quench his thirst by intoxicating pleasure or sensual indulgence. This may make him merry, but cannot make him happy. Whatever be the relish and allurements of sin, "at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." There is poison in the cup. Like the little book which the Apostle John had to take, sin is sweet as honey in the mouth, but when committed, bitter in the belly (Rev. x. 9). "Life, they say, is sweet; I have found it bitter," said a young artist in the closing scenes of death. Lord Chesterfield echoed the sentiment, when he said, "I have run the silly rounds of business and of pleasure, and have done with them all. I have enjoyed all the pleasures of the world and know their futility, and do not regret their loss. I appraise them at their real value, which is very low; whereas those who have not experienced them always overrate them. They only see the gay outside, and are dazzled with their glare; but I have been behind the scenes. I look back on all that is passed as one of those romantic dreams which opium commonly produces, and I have no wish to repeat the nauseous dose." This Marah is never dry. No art can sweeten, no draughts exhaust its perennial waters of bitterness. The bitterness of sin consists—1. *In its wretchedness.* Byron described himself as a man whose happiness was gone and could not be restored. "If I were to live over again," he writes, "I do not know what I would change in my life, except not to have lived at all." 2. *In its dissatisfaction.* After all toil and labour "the good" is ever absent. The thing which was expected to give joy palls on the instant it is obtained, like the apples of the Dead Sea, which turn to ashes when tasted. On and on! the spirit still cries, "Give, give." 3. *In its disappointment.* Solomon had tried everything, but unalloyed happiness was still beyond his grasp. He drank from broken cisterns, tasted the wormwood and the gall, and gives the verdict—"All was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." II. **The Punishment of Sin.** "The wind hath bound her up in her wings." The simple meaning of this is that they would be carried away with a swift and shameful destruction. So sudden is the overthrow of the wicked, that his designs are baffled, his life upset, and he himself overwhelmed with the tempest. "He shall take them away as with a whirlwind." 1. *This destruction is sudden.* The wind may sleep and be forgotten, but justice never fails. The sky is clear, men

settle down, and undisturbed pursue their folly; but "when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them." In their revelries they will be surprised, and, like Belshazzar, "they shall not escape." 2. *This destruction is violent.* What more violent than mighty winds tearing up the mountains and rending the rocks (Job xxviii. 9). The wicked cannot stand before the tempest of God's wrath and the thunder of his power. Cambyses, invading Ethiopia, sent a detachment to ravage the country. Herodotus says that "after they had left Oasis, they halted to take some repast, when a strong south wind arose and overwhelmed them beneath a mountain of sand." Plutarch, in the Life, speaking of the design of Alexander "to visit the temple of Jupiter Ammon," adds, "it was a long and laborious journey, and they might be surprised by a violent south wind amidst the wastes of sand, as it happened long before to the army of Cambyses. The wind raised the sand, and rolled it in such waves, that it devoured full 50,000 men." 3. *This destruction is shameful.* "They shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices." Ashamed on account of their sacrifices, or of them, and should forsake them and turn to God. But in any case both they and their sacrifices would be put to shame. (*a*) They would be *disappointed* in their sacrifices. They had brought nothing but evil, and not any good. Nothing good should be sought, or can be found, away from God. (*b*) They would be *detected* on hill and in dale, in public and private worship. They could not hide their shameful ways from God. Justice would discover them. "As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed." (*c*) They would be *exposed* in their shame. Exposed without refuge to Divine judgment. Shame and confusion of face will be the final issue of all the lofty expectations and the sinful ways of the ungodly. Shame is their present fruit, and what will be the results in eternity "of those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" "Many that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Avoid the guilt if you wish to escape the doom of Israel.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1—5. When God has a "controversy" with a people he appeals to conscience as a witness to his cause. He demands and should secure earnest heed. The speaker is great. The cause is most important, and concerns our spiritual and eternal welfare. If we cannot plead excuse now, how can we stand before the judgment-seat at last?

Consideration is the duty of the Church. Faith cometh by hearing, and every faculty of the mind should be bent to receive Divine teaching.

Ver. 6. *Knowledge.* Some years ago a vessel sailing on the northern coast of South America was seen to make signals of distress. When hailed by another vessel, they reported themselves as "dying for water!" "Dip it up, then," was the response; "you are in the mouth of the Amazon river." There was fresh water all around them, they had nothing to do but to dip it up, and yet they were dying of thirst, because they thought themselves surrounded by the salt sea. How often are men ignorant of their mercies! How sad that they should perish for lack of knowledge! Jesus is near the seeker even when he is tossed upon the oceans of doubt. The sinner has but to stoop down and drink and live; and yet he is ready to perish, as if salvation were hard to find [*Spurgeon*].

Those are marked for ruin that are deaf to reproof and reject good counsel. "Therefore," says Bp Pilkington, "let every one keep himself in God's schoolhouse and learn his lesson diligently. For as the body is nourished with meat, so is the soul with the word of God."

Ver. 7. *Gratitude.* Special favours call for great gratitude, as those who rent the largest farms generally pay the most for them. There is ingratitude in concealing a benefit or forgetting it, as well as not making a return for it; but the worst ingratitude is returning evil for good. *Prosperity.* No sooner does the

warm aspect of good fortune shine, than all the plans of virtue, raised like a beautiful frost-work in the winter season of adversity, thaw and disappear [*Warburton*].

Ver. 8, 9. *Covetousness* never judges anything unlawful. Blood is not too sacred for it to buy, nor religion too Divine for it to sell. It has turned the priests and ministers of God into mercenary hirelings. In Popery every shrine has its gift, every confession its cost, every prayer its charge, and every benediction its price [*Wilson*].

Ver. 10, 11. *Sin* is a disease equally dangerous, whether it works secretly within, or breaks out into odious displays of vice. Yielding to immoral pleasure *corrupts* the mind; living to animal and trifling ones *debases* it; and both in their degree *disqualify* it for its genuine good, and *consign* it over to wretchedness [*Wilson*].

Ver. 12—14. *Idolatry* is the adoption of a false god. *Apostasy* is the rejection of the true God. The idols of the heathen stood, so to speak, between heaven and earth, obscuring the vision of God, intercepting and appropriating the incense which should have ascended to the eternal throne. If we look upon the world as a musical instrument, well-tuned, and harmoniously struck, we ought not to worship the instrument, but the Being that makes the music.

Ver. 15—17. If sin be fashionable, Christians should be out of fashion. If others be punished for it, we should take warning from them. Three things arise from sin, viz. fear, shame, and punishment. The first arises from the guilt of sin, the second from its defilement, and the third from its demerit. A sinful life is the death of the soul. Look at sin in its guilt, malignity, and curse. Abhor it, oppose it, and dread it more than death [*Wilson*].

Ver. 18, 19. *Pleasure* taken into the soul is like liquor poured into a vessel; so much of it as it fills it also seasons; the touch and the tincture go together. It is certain sin has no real pleasures to bestow; they are all embittered, either by the strokes of providence from without, or the accusations of conscience from within. The fine colours of the serpent do by no means make amends for the smart and poison of his sting.

Penalties are often so long delayed, that men think they shall escape them; but they are certain to follow. When the whirlwind sweeps through the forest, at its first breath that giant tree, with all its boughs, falls crashing to the ground. But it had been preparing to fall twenty years. Twenty years before it received a gash, the water commenced to settle in it at some notch, and from thence decay began to reach in towards the heart of the tree. Every year the work of death progressed, till at length it stood all rottenness, and the first gale felled it to the ground. There are men, who for twenty years shame the day and the night with debaucheries, who yet seem strong and vigorous, but in reality are full of weakness and decay. They have been preparing to fall, and the first storm will strike them down in a moment [*Beecher*].

CHAPTER V.

Critical Notes.—**1. Hear**] A fresh beginning of reproof, connected with chapter iv., addressed to the priests, the royal family, and the whole kingdom. **Judg.**] Lit. *the* judgment announced in preceding chapter. **You**] Priests and court. **Snare**] A net laid to entice the people, like birds in a trap. **Miz.** and **Tab.**] Noted places, and peculiarly adapted for bird-catching. **2. Profound**] Lit. they have made slaughter deep, i. e. they have sunk deeply into it. Their sacrifices were slaughter, butcheries, and not offerings to God (cf. Is. xxxi. 6). Some, that the allusion is to deep pits covered over for beasts to fall in. Others give the sense of stretching out (Ps. ci. 3). They have deepened to stretch out excesses, i. e. they have gone to great lengths, are deeply sunken in excesses. The ringleaders laid deep designs to ensnare in idolatry. **Rebuker**] Lit. a rebuke or correction. God's attributes and conduct had taken the form of rebuke only towards them. **3. Know**]

their plans, deceit, and profound cunning (Rev. ii. 29). **All things are naked and opened to God. Now**] Even at the present time, when they forget me. Their wickedness is done in public and is undeniable. **4. Will not frame**] Heb. give their doings. Margin, will not suffer them. They are slaves, not free to turn from evil habits. Their works stand in the way, prevent them from returning. Habit is a second nature domineering over men's thoughts and ways. **In them**] The knowledge of God was wanting, the evil spirit had taken possession of their very centre, had its seat within them, and held resistless sway over them. **5. Pride**] The haughtiness of Is. shall be a witness before God of their folly. Others refer it to Jehovah, the glory of Is., who will witness by judgments and the destruction of their false glory (ch. vii. 10; Amos viii. 7). **Jud.**] shall fall, because participating in Israel's guilt. **6. Flocks**] to propitiate God. Sacrifices of no avail. **He has withdrawn** from them and will not hear prayer. **7.** Gives the reason. **Treacher.**] Acted faithlessly in the marriage contract (Jer. iii. 20). **Strange children**] Aliens, that have not sprung from conjugal union (ch. i. 2; cf. Deut. xxv. 5). **Month**] A very brief time; judgment is sudden and near. Others, the new moon, the festal season for sacrifices, will devour them. "Your sacrificial feasts shall not bring deliverance, but ruin" [*Keil*]. **8.** The evil denounced is vividly described as actually come. **9. Shall surely be**] Lit. established or well grounded in God's purpose. On lofty summits the invasion of the enemy is announced, Jud. is menaced, and Is. is occupied, destruction is sure and permanent. The kingdom shall be overcome and for ever laid waste. **10. Bound**] Removers of land-marks were to be cursed (Deut. xix. 14; xxvii. 17). Princes of Jud. had removed the boundaries of truth between Jehovah and Baal, the worship of God and idolatry. "If he who removes his neighbour's boundary is cursed, how much more he who removes the border of his God" [*Hengsten.*]. God's anger would fall upon them like water in full stream (Ps. lxix. 25; Jer. x. 25). **11. Oppressed**] with heavy calamity. **Broken**] Crushed in contest with God. **Command.**] The statutes of Jeroboam and Omri (1 Kings xii. 28; Mic. vi. 16). **12. Moth and rottenness**] Destructive powers, one injuring cloths, the other wood and flesh; slowly but surely do they work (Job xiii. 28). The sinner has foes within and without; conscience gnaws like a worm, and Divine judgment falls like a plague. **13. Sick.**] Not civil war between the two kingdoms, for both were wounded. Apostasy with its train of moral corruptions was the disease of the body politic (Is. i. 6). **Eph.**] with whom the prophecy has chiefly to do, sought help and found none from Assyria. **14. Lion**] A fierce, roaring lion. **Young lion**] An emblem of strength and ferocity. They can no more defend themselves from God's judgments than from fierce lions which attack. **Tear**] to pieces. **Go away**] I surely back into its cave with its prey. **15. Acknowledge**] i. e. feel the guilt and punishment of sin; repent and return to God. The Heb. includes the idea of suffering. **Afflict.**] awakens the need of mercy, and urges to God. **Seek**] most earnestly and urgently (cf. ii. 9; Deut. iv. 29, 30).

HOMILETICS.

National Sins and Divine Detection.—*Verses* 1—3.

In this chapter God proceeds in the same method and carries on the same controversy as before. The kingdoms are first cited and then accused. All ranks are guilty of idolatry and pollutions, of obstinacy and impenitency in guilt. It is not an ordinary challenge, as of one displeased only, but the judicial procedure and sentence of the Supreme Judge. "*Hear ye this.*" The words set forth national sins, the Divine detection, and open rebuke of them.

I. The national sins. All ranks are accused: the priests, the rulers, and the people. Though some were enticed by others, that does not render them without excuse. The prophet rebukes all, without respect of persons, and shows how justly God was angry with their sins. 1. *The priests were guilty.* They used their sacred office and their high position to ensnare the people. (1.) *They corrupted the law of God.* They were the depositaries of this sacred trust; were appointed to expound and keep unsullied the truth of God. They had to teach the statutes which the Lord had spoken unto them by Moses (Lev. x. 11). The people inquired from them, and they gave judgment (Deut. xvii. 9, 11). They were the messengers of the Lord of hosts, and should have preserved knowledge (Mal. ii. 7). But instead of feeding the people they starved them, lead them into error and sin. There was neither freshness nor power in their ministry. The science of salvation, the word and the work of God, were not the study of their life. When ministers study and prepare to consume it upon pride and self-confidence; when they seek to please the fancy rather than gain the souls of men; when they grow cold and careless of their own, then they get dull and pitiless concerning the souls of others. Unto them are committed the oracles of God. These oracles they must consult

and declare to the people. Their word and doctrine, their life and example, like the breastplate of Aaron, must be a bright reflection of them. The truth of God must not be mixed with human tradition, nor displaced by commandments of men. To teach the law to others and profane it ourselves is mockery.

> "I venerate the man whose heart is warm,
> Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose life
> Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
> That he is honest in the sacred cause."

(2.) *They corrupted the worship of God.* The spirituality of God is a practical truth demanding corresponding spirituality in worship. God has absolute and sole right to prescribe how he will be worshipped. But the history of mankind abundantly proves a disposition in human beings to devise and act for themselves in this respect. In the patriarchal and prophetic periods the worship of God was mixed with idolatry. Heroes and beasts have been deified. The heavens and the earth, the ocean and the air, have been peopled with gods. Even now men are dissatisfied with the simplicity and forgetful of the authority of Divine institutes. Worship is thought to consist in words, forms, and gestures. The body assumes the posture and the lips utter the language of devotion, but often there is neither prayer nor praise. It is sad when the priests of God are guilty of innovation, and teach that "fear towards him was taught by the precepts of men" (Isa. xxix. 13). The apostles were exceedingly jealous of any defect, redundancy, or admixture in the worship of God. But Jewish priests debased the institutions and corrupted the law of God. They had embraced and strengthened the idolatry by which they were surrounded, and by apostasy had seduced the people. Their teaching was a snare and their lives a curse. (3.) *They despised the reproof of God.* "Though I have been a rebuker of them all." God by his prophet and by his providence had sought to correct them in vain. Rebuke after rebuke had been given, forbidding idolatry and urging amendment, but Israel was immersed in sin; kings and priests revolted more and more. God warns his Church and his servants, and gives smaller corrections to reclaim them; but if these are despised, the sin becomes more aggravated and the punishment more severe. Apostates and revolters are often given up to gross superstitions, cruel rites, and deeper courses. They may have ability to adorn and defend their crafty designs, but they will be caught by their own deceits. The rebuke of the formalist is solemn; but to immoral teachers, who make grace a cover for sin, and soundness of creed for rottenness of life, God speaks in thunder. Scribes and Pharisees were openly reproved for rejecting the law and misleading the people. "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee." 2. *The rulers were guilty.* "Give ye ear, O house of the king." The priest had to teach and the king enforce the law; but king and priest were alike guilty for corrupting it. Both had been crafty and cruel in carrying out their designs, by patronizing idolatry and leading the nation from Jehovah. Monarchs fulfil a high vocation as representatives of God and his law. They should care for the purity of religion and the administration of justice. If they neglect and violate the law, pervert justice, and encourage vice, they are recreant to God, from whom they receive authority and to whom they are responsible. They are not to assume undue authority, but to establish and preserve good and just laws; to govern in wisdom, equity, and love; to punish evil-doers and encourage them that do well. Asa removed wickedness from the throne, and Amaziah punished it with death. Nehemiah was a great reformer, and Alfred the Great a witness for truth in an age of darkness. But the court of Israel was as corrupt as the priesthood. Instead of being benefactors, they were contaminators to their race. Priests in their saintly robes and kings in their royal garbs have oft been foes in human forms; solemn warnings to the ungodly and profane. They are the greatest sinners, in seducing others,

and must suffer the severest punishment. (1.) They enticed to idolatry; (2.) They enticed to destruction. "Judgment is toward you." 3. *The People were guilty* Though ensnared by their teachers and princes, they were to blame and had no excuse for their sin. We are to think and act for ourselves. Neither the enticement of the priest nor the terror of the king can force us to do wrong; neither the laws nor the lives of superiors can make us bow down to sin. Like the three Hebrew youths, we should not regard the fashions of the court nor the dictum of the priest. We must not partake of other men's sins lest we share other men's sufferings. Ephraim was duped willingly and therefore inexcusably. "He willingly walked after the commandment" and was "oppressed and broken in judgment" (verse 11). (1.) The people followed bad examples; (2.) Voluntarily corrupted themselves by idolatry. National sins are the sum of individual contributions. God here arraigns and condemns all classes in the threefold summons. The privileges of the priest, the dignity of the prince, and the number of the people, cannot excuse and do not exempt them from Divine judgments. "Daniel Webster," says Dr Thomas, "was once asked, 'What is the most important thought you ever entertained?' He replied after a moment's reflection, 'The most important thought I ever had was my individual responsibility to God.'" "Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God." **II. The Divine detection.** "I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me." God intimately knows and observes the conduct of men. His knowledge is without defect and his judgment without error. Nothing can be hid or concealed from him. Men may deceive themselves, think God does not notice them, and vail their ways from others, but the omniscient eye of God penetrates the covering and brings all things to light. By his word and providence he discovers sin, puts it before us in true colours, and warns us to flee from it. All excuses and plausible pretexts are torn away, and the sinner is exposed in nakedness and danger. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." 1. *Sin is detected notwithstanding human ingenuity to cover it.* Men excuse and plead infirmity and mistake. (1.) *Sin is often covered by ignorance.* Ignorance itself is a sin when it can be removed. Ignorance in daily calling is "not bliss," for lessened power involves lessened earnings and fewer comforts and conveniences of life. Men always pay for ignorance. They cannot justify themselves when they sin against light and truth. Ministers will not be able to plead at last, "We knew it not." They should watch for souls as those that must give account. (2.) *Sin is often covered by cunning craft.* Jewish leaders were crafty in their designs and deep in their schemes. They pretended friendship and goodwill, but they were snares and nets to the people (Ecc. vii. 26). Their rulers with great subtlety laid hold of Israel's love for idols and reverence for their ancestors, and sought to replace the presence of God by the symbols of nature. Around the worship of Baal were gathered the rites of Moses. The services were decked out and adorned with feasts and fasts, instrumental music and songs; upheld by tithes, by civil authority, by prophet, priest, and king. Leaders sought to please that they might ruin; to flatter that they might devour; but "God taketh the wise in their own craftiness." 2. *Sin is detected notwithstanding State policy to uphold it.* In Israel selfish interests were put before eternal policy before principle; and the welfare of the State must be upheld though the people be ruined. In these modern days expediency is often put before morality, State revenues before virtue, and immorality sanctioned by legislators and teachers. We shall do well to heed what a writer says concerning England. "We may succeed for a time by fraud, by surprise, by violence, but we can succeed permanently only by means directly opposite. It is not alone the courage, the intelligence, the activity of the merchant and manufacturer which maintain the superiority of their productions and the character of their country; it is far more their wisdom, their economy, and above all their probity. If ever in the British Islands the useful citizen should lose these virtues, we may be sure that, for England, as for every other country, the vessels

of a degenerate commerce, repulsed from every shore, would speedily disappear from those seas whose surface they now cover with the treasures of the universe, bartered for the treasures of the industry of the three kingdoms" Religion raises, strengthens, and dignifies a nation. Its industry and civilization depend upon true character and not false policy. Even in war Napoleon said the moral was ten to one to the physical. State policy is often State folly and God-dishonouring policy. "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness, for the throne is established by righteousness." **III. The solemn call.** "Hear ye this." 1. *A universal call.* A call to all classes in Israel to hear and consider their ways. 2. *An urgent call.* "For judgment is toward you." The judges are summoned before the Judge of judges and the King of kings. This is a matter that must be attended to. All ranks are guilty when God has a controversy with a nation. 3. *A present call.* Hear and repent now; delays are dangerous. "Now is the accepted time." Indifference, moral insensibility, are seen on every hand. Ignorance, carelessness, and opposition to the gospel abound. The authority of the caller, and the interests at stake, urge attention to the message: "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Kings and priests *snares* to the people, by erroneous doctrine, fraudulent counsels, evil example, and subtle edicts, and by employing exalted position to lead astray.

Men-trappers — their motive, efforts, pretences, and punishment. Why not attack openly? Why plot and scheme? Because subtlety is the nature of sin and the serpent, and most likely to succeed. "Great ill is an achievement of great powers. Plain sense but rarely leads us far astray."

Silly people—led astray; like beasts and birds, always exposed and easily overcome by "*the snare of the fowler.*" We are foolish and weak, and apt to be lured to destruction by cunning foes. Hence the need of (*a*) watchfulness, (*b*) prayer, and (*c*) dependence upon God.

Cunning policy. 1. Most impudent. 2. Most guilty. 3. Most degrading. 4. Most ruinous.

Hear ye this. Preachers should rebuke the sins of rulers as well as those of subjects, so that they bear not the guilt of the souls that are lost, whose blood God will require at their hands [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

The Power of Evil Habits.—*Verse* 4.

The prophet makes a fourth charge of obstinacy through affected ignorance of God and long custom in sin. God had been "*their God*" by covenant and tender care, but they despised and abused his mercy, and "*would not,*" could not turn unto him. They were so habituated to evil practices that they were not only indisposed but ill-affected towards God. They lost all power to return, and were perfect slaves to evil habits. They were possessed by the spirit of whoredom, an evil spirit which impelled and carried them on to sin.

I. The spring of evil habits. "The spirit of whoredom is in the midst of them." In their centre and seat a mighty power held resistless and triumphant sway. Sinful habits spring from sinful nature. 1. *They spring from ignorance of God.* "They have not known the Lord." They might have known him, for they had the law and the prophets of God. They were wilfully, shamefully ignorant. Some have not knowledge of God—I speak this to your shame. Sin at first was the cause of ignorance, but now ignorance is the cause of sin. Swearing, lying, and murder abounded in the land "because there was no knowledge of God." All sins are seminally lodged in this one. It leads to error (Matt. xxii. 29), persecu-

tion (John xvi. 2, 3), and to rejection of Christ. Aristotle says ignorance is the mother of all misrule in the world. As certain epidemics are generated and become active during night, in places not visited by the beams of the sun, so mental and moral ignorance spread pernicious influence and scatter seeds of death. That ignorance which keeps men slaves to evil makes them hate the freedom of truth. Sinners dread, decline to know God, lest they be disturbed in their sinful ways. They are ignorant of his beauty and excellency, goodness and love; they despise his mercy and forbearance; providential warnings and judgments fail to convince them of sin and bring them to repentance. Knowledge is the life of the soul—the life of intelligence to *know* God; the life of power to *love* him. 2. *They spring from an evil heart towards God.* The heart of the Jews was alienated and perverse. Love which appealed to their affections could not reclaim them. The heart is the source, the mainspring of human conduct, and when that is defiled the character and the life will be defiled. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." His thoughts and feelings identify him with his moral self, and discriminates him from others. They place him in a distinct relation to God, and morally fix him in "his own place." This "hidden man of the heart" subordinates the outer man and the outer world to itself. Habits result from acts repeated; and from habit results character and its consolidation. Like the gradual growth of an everlasting mountain, character is always acquiring a bolder outline and firmer base. It is the slow and conscious product of man's voluntary nature.

> Each man makes his own stature, builds himself;
> Virtue alone outbuilds the pyramids:
> Her monuments shall last, when Egypt's fall.

II. The result of evil habits. "They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God." If their habits of sin had not got the mastery over them they rendered them indisposed to return. But the margin gives another sense. Their doings would not suffer them, and they could not turn inwardly, while they did not turn outwardly. 1. *Habits influence the will.* "They *will* not." The more they sinned the more disposed they were to sin, and the less power they had to do right. This is just the result of habit. By repetition of evil, moral power is diminished. The will becomes impotent and the conscience seared. But moral power is required to resist evil passions which prompt to repetitions of acts, hence the less the power to resist the easier the repetition of an act. Thus evil begets a tendency to evil; goes on repeating and enlarging itself; binding the will, alienating the heart, and driving men from God. "It is a people that do err in their *heart*, and they have not known my ways." "Ye *will not* come unto me." 2. *Habits enslave the life.* There was not simply the tendency, but the *tyranny* of sin. We may calculate the immediate effects of an act, but if the act lead to the habit the ultimate results must not be overlooked. Drunkenness and sensuality have sprung from repeated acts. Perverted judgment at the beginning of life may disqualify a man for believing the gospel at the close. Men may not mean to plunge deeply into vice, but when the steps are taken and repeated they are fastened with their own chain. Habit is stronger than reason and stronger than taste. When a man gives himself up to its power he loses freedom and self-control, and it governs him "with authority." Wicked men allow free will to be inactive; give bridle to desire and passion; acquire habits of vice; and at last are bound by chains of iron. Augustine thus speaks of the force of habit in his *Confessions:* "My will the enemy held, and thence had made a chain for me, and bound me. For of a froward will was a lust made; and a lust served became custom; and custom not resisted became necessity. By which links, as it were, joined together (whence I called it a chain) a hard bondage held me enthralled." Most people think lightly of sins, believe they can give them up easily, but Saul found his evil passions his torment and captivity. He had convictions of duty, but his very efforts to extricate himself from evil increased his guilt and misery, and he rushed from habitual crime to

endless misery (1 Chron. x. 13, 14). "A rooted habit becomes a governing principle. Every lust we entertain deals with us as Delilah did with Samson: not only robs us of our strength, but leaves us fast bound," says Tillotson. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself; and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

The longer the continuance in sin, the more difficult is the return. He who commits sin is the servant of sin. At first he will not return, at last he cannot. The heart is hardened. The spirit of whoredom: not single sins that are committed, but an evil spirit rising up and taking possession of the soul. The more men sin against God, the more they lose the knowledge of him, and the more difficult it is for them to return; and so the chastisement of God must be more severe to bring them back to him [*Lange*].

The slavery of sin. Men in bondage to conscious guilt and innumerable habits. They are often the dupes of ignorance, prejudice, and passion. 1. There is the slave of *ignorance*. 2. There is the slave of *superstition*. 3. There is the slave of *bigotry*. 4. There is the slave of *passion*. 5. There is the slave of *sensual appetites*. 6. The slave of *evil habits*.

"He is the freeman, whom the truth makes free,
And all are slaves beside."

Frame their doings, i. e. take necessary steps to conversion. 1. By consideration. 2. By amendment of life. "They might have sought and yet not made speed, because of their unsoundness and formality in their way, but they were either so ignorant, or malicious and impious, as they did not so much as endeavour to bend their course that way" [*Hutcheson*].

Men "know not the Lord," or else they would not persistently and suicidally turn from him. They may have intellectual but not practical knowledge. A man really knows no more than he puts into practice. Eli's two sons "knew not God," because they loved and obeyed him not. Ignorance of God, affected or acquired, is "the mother" of mischief and misery, not "of devotion."

HOMILETICS.

God Testifying against Man.—*Verses* 5—7.

The power and pride of Israel were great. They boasted of their kings, their privileges, and even of their sins. This pride testified against them in the sight of God. Pride never conceals itself, but rises in rebellion and pleads for punishment. Or if God himself be their boast and pride, he would witness against them for their presumptuous sins and self-reliance. "They know not Jehovah; they do not concern themselves about him; therefore he himself will bear witness by judgments, by the destruction of their false glory (cf. ch. ii. 10—14), against the face of Israel, i. e. bear witness to their face." God witnesses against man's sin in the following ways:

I. **God testifies against sin by the ministry of the word.** God has three grand witnesses in the world; the Holy Scripture, Christian Church, and the Christian Ministry. All testify to his existence, love, and truth. But the ministry is a special agency, a Divine appointment to bring sinners to Christ; a monument of truth, and the means to spread it. The true cause of man's wretchedness and the only cure must be kept in view. Ministers must proclaim the guilt and the consequent danger of men, their inability to renew and save themselves—must ever testify to the justice of God in punishing the impenitent, and the love of God in Christ. Boldness in the commission must be met by boldness in the reproof of sin. Sinners are careless, and must be roused by Divine threatenings. Ministers must reprove and rebuke, curse and condemn all sin; save themselves and those that hear them. Their testimony against iniquity must be constant and clear. "Do you not know

that my life has been licentious, and that I have violated the commandments of God?" said a dying nobleman to his clergyman, for whom he sent. "You have neglected to warn and instruct me, and now my soul will be lost!" "The Lord testified against Israel and against Judah by all the prophets and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes." **II. God testifies against sin by the witness of conscience.** Fallen as human nature is, God has not left himself without a witness in its centre and seat. Conscience, the vicegerent of God enthroned within, pronounces sentence, and acquits or condemns. A guilty conscience needs no accuser. It is the harbinger of wrath, and makes "the wicked flee when no man pursueth." "Conscience doth make cowards of us all." The victim of remorse withers beneath an influence unseen, and shrinks from an anticipation of judgment to come. Adam tried to hide himself from God. Cain was terrified at his own guilt. Infidels have often felt that "the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them." "There is no man that is knowingly wicked," says Tillotson, "but is guilty to himself; and there is no man that carries guilt about him, but he receives a sting into his soul." Conscience allows no excuse, no compromise. There is nothing but right or wrong in its court. Moral government is administered by moral sanctions, and the wisdom of God is seen in fixing a tribunal in the bosom of every human being. "He that will not hearken to the warnings of conscience must feel the woundings of conscience." **III. God testifies against sin by the judgments of providence.** "Therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity." Pride always comes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Sin ever brings ruin upon churches and nations. Men combine and exalt themselves in wickedness, but in the providence of God they fall, and great is their fall. The destruction of the cities of the plain by fire and of the world by flood are solemn lessons in history. 1. *Judgments come suddenly.* The festal season on which they prided themselves and offered sacrifices to God would bring no joy nor deliverance. Judgment would be sudden and surprising. Rapidly and unexpectedly the end would come. Invasion would sweep away their garrisons and resources. The month, the moon waxing till full and waning away, would measure the time. Men may indulge in luxury, intemperance, and vice; but the day of retribution will carry them away. Cruel devices will be detected, and wicked men "fall" helpless and undone. Easy transitions from one thing to another cause no terror; but in everything sudden and unexpected attention is roused and nature startled. God warns, "but evil men" are wilfully ignorant, and "understand not judgment." "Desolation shall come upon thee suddenly which thou shalt not know." 2. *Judgments come impartially.* There is no respect of persons with God's providence. Special promises and special privileges may be given to some; but they do not escape the general calamity. Judah and Ephraim were alike guilty and alike punished. National judgments are universal, spare neither saints nor sinners, young nor old, rich nor poor. They fall on all ranks impartially. The priest cannot protect the prince; nor the prince the priest. Those who entice will not be able to deliver the enticed; nor the enticed excuse for being misled. When God pleads, "it shall be as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him." 3. *Judgments come unavoidably.* They cannot be warded off by any device or desire of man. The sentence is uttered and must be fulfilled. God cannot change nor be defeated in his purpose. He withdrew from Israel and would not aid them. (1.) *Late repentance cannot ward off judgment.* The people had been careless and indifferent in their prosperity. Now when judgments are threatened they are alarmed, and vow to God in sacrifice. Many repent of sin, but their sorrow is that of Judas, not of Peter. They are sorry for the consequences of sins, but not for the sins themselves; confess their wrong, but do not wish to forsake it. They vow

and resolve, pay homage to God, and wish to escape, but they cannot. Nothing could rouse them when punishment was only predicted, but when it comes, then they bestir themselves and cry for mercy. They are "lashed from sins to sighs; and by degrees from sighs to vows; from vows to bended knees." Life is often spent in sin, and then offered to God in its dregs and decrepitude. "True repentance is never too late, but late repentance is seldom true." "Ah! Mr Hervey," said a dying man, "the day in which I ought to have worked is over, and now I see a horrible night approaching, bringing with it the blackness of darkness for ever. Woe is me! When God called I refused. Now I am in sore anguish, and yet this is but the beginning of sorrows. I shall be destroyed with everlasting destruction." (2.) *Outward reformation cannot ward off judgments.* Many are penitent, give up some sins, but not all. They make great sacrifices, and put forth desperate efforts to amend their lives. Whatever will shelter them from present calamity they earnestly seek. "They go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord," but do not devote themselves to him. Good works cannot compensate for evil works. Tears may be abundant and sorrow deep, but no art can evade and no power resist the punishment. Superstition and Infidelity have devised means to allay the anguish of a wounded spirit; but their rites and sophistries, salvos and palliatives, have been in vain. The bitterness of the spendthrift cannot recover his lost property; nor the sorrow of the sensualist restore the bloom of his cheek. The sinner cannot repair the injury done to himself and others, nor reinstate himself in holiness before God. Justice is immutable, and punishment is certain to follow the violation of moral as of physical law. It is sad to think that many "fall" without deliverance, and seek when it is too late. Sin brings judgments which cannot be averted by formal worship and outward reformation. "I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand." "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?" &c.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 5. *The Pride of Israel.* 1. Pride their greatest sin. 2. Pride their continual sin. 3. Pride their destructive sin.

Ver. 6. *They shall not find him.* God is not found—1. When not sought earnestly; 2. When not sought with a pure motive; 3. When sought in slavish fear; 4. When sought too late. When the judgments of God are drawing near fear impels the most reluctant and the most reprobate to seek God; but the words of Christ prove true—"Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am, thither ye cannot come." "God waits long for sinners: He threatens long before he strikes: He strikes and pierces in lesser degrees and with increasing severity, before the final blow comes. In this life he places man in a new state of trial even after his first judgments have fallen upon the sinner. But the general rule of his dealings is this; that when the time of each judgment is actually come, then as to *that* judgment it is too late to pray It is *not* too late for other mercy or for final forgiveness, so long as man's state of probation lasts; but it is too late as to this one. And thus each judgment in time is a picture of the eternal judgment, when the day of mercy is past for ever to those who have finally in this life hardened themselves against it" [*Pusey*].

Ver. 7. *Treacherously.* Men cloak their sins and act deceitfully in God's service—1. When they vow and do not perform; 2. When they pray and do not labour; 3. When the outward performance does not agree with the inward condition. In the sanctuary they are often one thing, in daily life another. "Measure not men by Sundays," says Fuller, "without regarding what they do all the week after."

1. He that serves God with the body, without the soul, serves God deceitfully. 2. He that serves God with the soul, without the body, when both can be conjoined, doth the work of the Lord

deceitfully. 3. They are deceitful in the Lord's work that reserve one faculty for sin, or one sin for themselves, or one action to please their appetite and many for religion. 4. And they who think God sufficiently served with abstaining from evil, and converse not in the acquisition and pursuit of holy charity and religion [*Jer. Taylor*].

The unfaithfulness and treachery of Israel were transmitted to their children, who were regarded by God as the offspring of idolatry. When children, the hope of the future, are reared in apostasy there is little prospect of national amendment. Godless children are punished like Godless parents, the rising generation suffer with the present, may be cut off, and both may perish with their portions and possessions.

HOMILETICS.

"An Earnest Ministry the want of the Times."—*Verses* 8—11.

The prophet is now commanded to warn the people—to sound the horn, and stand upon the most prominent places on the borders of Benjamin. The judgment is certain; the enemy is near, and the nation must be roused from its slumbers. With intense feeling and earnestness the alarm is given. Hence the title of our subject borrowed from Angell James.

I. The nature of an earnest ministry. Life is earnest and happy only in the degree in which it is consecrated to action. Action and enjoyment are contingent upon each other. When we are unfit for work we are incapable of pleasure and success. Hence the advice, "Be in earnest." Earnestness in the Christian ministry is not mere activity, noise, and bustle. It is the pursuit of a certain object, and the determination to accomplish it; an endeavour to realize our aspirations. "This one thing I do." 1. *It is specific in design.* One thing filled and fired the mind of Hosea. He saw the danger, and longed to deliver his people from it. Amid many inferior designs, the preacher has one chiefly in view. His mind is not intently employed nor his heart deeply engaged on a multiplicity of objects. He has not energy and time thus to divide. He has selected his object, made up his mind, and cannot be driven from it. His sermons are preached and his efforts directed to the conversion of sinners. When a few friends stood round the bed of Dr Beecher, one put the question, "Dr B., you know a great many things, tell us which is the greatest of all things." In a moment he brightened up and replied, "It is not theology, it is not controversy, but it is to save souls." No earnest minister will be satisfied without this. Applause, honour, and position sink into insignificance. He cries out, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you." 2. *It is enthusiastic in feeling.* "O Benjamin," cried the prophet. The heart yearns "when thought" is "enkindled to a high degree." The abstractions of the intellect kindle the affections of the heart. Where there is no feeling, there can be no fervour of spirit. "We want men with burning hearts," said a heathen to a missionary. Ministers are the best orators when they feel. The spring of power is within, and the life that quickens dwells in the soul. Feeble preachers result from feeble Christians. There is often cold orthodoxy without fire. The soul is not poured into duty, and all is routine and form. "The wildest enthusiasm is more rational than indifference," says Paley. It is said of Baxter when he preached, "you might find his very spirit drenched therein." Noise and display may attract attention, just as Eastern mourners wailing for the dead stir the sympathies of the multitude. But the man whose soul is profoundly moved is "pressed in spirit" and often of "silent tears." He speaks in words that burn and thoughts that breathe. "O that I was all heart and soul and spirit," said Rowland Hill, "to tell the glorious gospel of Christ to perishing multitudes." 3. *It is conducted under Divine guidance.* We all feel the need of direction in the choice of a sphere and the discharge of duty. But in the ordinary and the special work, in the cottage and in the pulpit, the minister must seek

Divine aid. In the study of the word and the discovery of truth: in matter, manner, and results, our sufficiency must come from God. God directed the prophet to speak. The Spirit guided the apostles to persons and places, and in public and private efforts "the hand of the Lord was with them." We must not only recognize, but honour the Holy Spirit by seeking his direction and speaking under his inspiration. If Pericles never ascended the rostrum without imploring a blessing from the gods, does he not condemn many Christian ministers? "I forgot explicitly and expressly, when I began, to crave help from God, and the chariot-wheels drove accordingly. Lord, forgive my omissions, and keep me in the way of duty," wrote Philip Henry. In a large town or a country village, in the beginning and at the end of our ministry, we must "stand and wait," eager for work—

> "Ready to run at his command;
> At his command stand still."

4. *It is characterized by constant activity.* Work is the law of our being, the living principle that carries men and nations onward. Nothing but constant toil maintains their authority and extends their dominion. "We must work (*Laboremus*)," said the Emperor Severus on his death-bed at York, where he had been carried on a litter from the foot of the Grampians. A fervent spirit will prompt to active life. Hearty relish for our work, and a sense of its importance, will inspire with ardour. The nation requires a living ministry, earnest men, men that will pray and labour, watch and weep for souls. "Oh that I were a flame of fire in my Master's cause," cried Brainerd.

> "Wake, ere the earthly charm unnerve thee quite,
> And be thy thoughts to work Divine addrest:
> Do something, do it soon—with all thy might!
> An angel's wing would droop if long at rest,
> And God himself inactive were no longer blest."

III. The necessity of an earnest ministry. Ephraim was not merely to be chastised, wasted by famine, but destroyed; to become a desolation, an entire waste. When Judah had removed the bounds, broken through all restraints human and Divine, then destruction like a flood would overwhelm the land. Yet they were careless and insensible to danger. Men now are asleep in sin, heedless of Divine warning. Ministers must "cry aloud and spare not." "I love those that thunder out the word," said Whitfield. "The Christian world is in a deep sleep. Nothing but a loud voice can awaken them out of it." 1. *Earnestness is demanded by the spiritual condition of men.* "Ephraim shall be desolate;" "I will pour out my wrath upon them like water." God rebuked, judgments were threatened, but they were impenitent and presumptuous. (1) *The danger is real.* It is not imaginative, not an alarm to frighten. Sin and punishment, heaven and hell, are awful realities. The truth must be told. Without Christ the sinner cannot escape—will be lost, eternally lost. (2) *The danger is near:* Not like an enemy afar off, but on the borders, in the land, spreading desolation on every hand. Sin enters the heart, exposes to present danger and eternal death. (3) *The danger is overwhelming.* "Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment," crushed by his own folly and oppressed by captivity. Danger within and without, nothing but danger! Who can withstand when God pours out his wrath like a deep and irresistible flood? (*a*) *It was severe*—"a flood." (*b*) *It was fixed*—"which shall surely be." (*c*) *It was perpetual*—the desolation was for ever, the grandeur of the nation was never restored. "Flee from the wrath to come." 2. *Earnestness is demanded by the activity of the age.* The features of the age are peculiar and not a little hostile to the gospel, notwithstanding great revivals. Earnestness marks every department of life. Restlessness and energy are found in trade and commerce, science and literature. Rationalism, Ritualism, and Scepticism are seen in battle arrayed. We must meet this activity, which is the boast, before it becomes the bane, of the age; direct it to its proper ends; and turn its turbid currents into streams of life. What [illegible] an earnest ministry can

intone society, rouse and help God's people to bear up against Mammon and the selfish spirit of the day? Energy in politics, education, and philanthropy necessitate deeper feeling in the preacher. Tame and spiritless sermons, common-place performances on Sunday, will not break the spell of six days' excitement and influence. We require a Whitfield and a Wesley, sons of thunder the spirit of Luther, to rebuke this material and utilitarian age. "Nothing is more indecent," says Baxter, "than a dead preacher speaking to dead sinners the living truth of the living God." The earnestness of this holy man was exemplified in his own lines—

"I'll preach as though I ne'er should preach again;
And as a dying man to dying men!"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 9. I. *Days of rebuke.* 1. Days of solemn warning; 2. Days of grievous affliction; 3. Days of actual calamities, to individuals and families, churches and nations. II. *Days of rebuke unheeded.* Followed by—1. Severer threatening—2. Awful destruction. The scattered sons of Israel were made preachers to the nations around, Divine warnings to all people. Or, I. *The cause of rebuke*—"iniquity" (ver. 5). God pronounced sentence upon the nation; individuals contribute to national guilt, and must feel their responsibility. God is angry with sin, and seeks to purge his people from it, to take away the evils, not the comforts of life; the dross, not the gold. II. *The design of rebuke.* Trials are not penal afflictions to God's people, but fatherly corrections, friendly rebukes. III. *The effect of rebuke*—"desolate in the day of rebuke." Ephraim was not restored. The wicked are consumed, utterly destroyed, when rebuked in wrath and hot displeasure. The believer is chastened, but not destroyed; treated not as an enemy, but as an erring child. "God may rebuke when he is angry, and yet restrain in his anger; but to rebuke in his anger, is to let loose the reins to his anger, and to make it outrun his mercy. Then what a miserable case to be in! to have his anger assault me and not his mercy relieve me."

Ver. 10. *Bounds.* The land-mark was a memorial of antiquity and the rights of man (Prov. xxii. 28). Its removal was forbidden as selfish and unjust invasion of property (Deut. xix. 4); irreverence for well-established principles; love for rash innovation; branded with a curse (Deut. xxvii. 17), and regarded as the cause of national provocation. The heathen admitted the sanctity of land-marks, and honoured them as gods, without which every field would be subject to contention. God himself has set bounds in the physical and moral world; locating each nation; restraining each part; and governing the whole. Hence removal of bounds is—1. Encroachment upon Divine authority; 2 Destruction of moral distinctions; 3. Exposure to moral guilt. Some remove bounds and set up others. Israel removed the law of God and set up their own will (ver. 11). Rome takes away Scripture and sets up tradition. Philosophy rejects the gospel and substitutes science. The application must not be absolute and universal. We are not to be too conservative in politics and religion, nor yet too rash with innovations; but seek the mean between blind reverence for antiquity and love of novelties.

Ver. 11. Notice—I. The object of pursuit—"*the commandment.*" An object sinful, ensnaring, and dangerous. II. The method of pursuit—"*willingly.*" A method easy to comply with, fashionable, and upheld by State authority. III. The results of pursuit—"*oppressed*" from without, "*broken in judgment*" from within. (*a*) A natural result; (*b*) A just result. "Ephraim preferred man's commands and laws to God's; they obeyed man and set God at nought, therefore they should suffer at man's hands, who, while he equally neglected God's will, enforced his own. For this sin God judged them justly, even through the unjust judgment of man. God mostly punishes, thro' their own choice, those who choose against his. The Jews

said, We have no king but Cæsar, and Cæsar destroyed them [*Pusey*].

The commandment of men, though enforced by authority, terror, and danger, is no excuse for sin. Sin does not cease to be voluntary, inexcusable, and aggravating on that account. Oppressors corrupt the worship of God, flatter and carry away the people, till their own ends be accomplished, but they will crush them in the long run. Jeroboam carried on the rent under pretence of ridding the people of great oppressions, and invented a way of religion pretending the people's ease, yet by him and his successors "*Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment;*" not only in the righteous judgment of God, but in the administration of justice they were crushed by corrupt rulers, who were great bribers (ch. iv. 18) [*Hutcheson*].

HOMILETICS.

Destruction Slow and Sure.—*Verse* 12.

The ten tribes are compared to a garment eaten by the moth, and Judah is consumed by rottenness. The moth is injurious to clothing. The worm penetrates both wood and flesh. Both prefigure the inward and outward corruption of Israel; destruction slowly and surely progressing (Job xiii. 28).

I. Destruction small in its beginning. The moth is a small and mischievous creature. Touch it, and you kill it; permit it to live, and it makes havoc in the dwelling. Sins of youth may be despised and indulged, but they harden the heart and prepare for greater sins. Nations are not destroyed at once; families and churches are not always suddenly overcome. Some moral disease, like the moth, quietly gnaws away their beauty and vitality. Pride, intemperance, and vice prey upon their reputation and royalty. They are crushed with the moth. **II. Destruction slow in its progress.** Little by little the hardest wood is pierced. Silently and slowly do rottenness and decay work their end. Yonder river rolling to the sea, rises from some small spot, and widens as it flows to join the mighty deep. The inhabitants of primeval forests are often startled by the fall of some giant tree. For centuries it was strong and grand in its foliage, but fell a victim to rottenness and decay. Insects came and gradually bored its sides and peeled its bark; the wind and air got access to its centre and heart. Now it lies a helpless trunk, to blend in common dust—"the place thereof knows it no more." Family honour, mercantile prosperity, and national enterprises, may be upheld and flourish for a season. But secret sins and religious declensions, luxury and effeminacy, are, like the moth, slowly working out destruction. Rottenness entered the nations of antiquity, and their grandeur decayed like a flower. Superstition and priestly ambition, a sectarian and worldly spirit, will destroy spiritual life in our modern churches; lukewarmness and pride will hasten their ruin, and make them "desolate in the day of rebuke." **III. Destruction sure in its end.** Wherever the moth dwells destruction is costly and sure. The house of the moth is not a mansion of iron, a lasting habitation which never falls to ruin. The most precious stores are devoured. Rich perfumes and purple apparel are consumed and frittered away. "The moth," says Dr Thomas, "is often so small and secret in its workings that medical science can seldom find it out, and when it finds it out, though it may check it for a time, it cannot destroy it: the moth defies all medicine." So the judgments of God upon sin may be small in beginning, but increase in severity, and at length bring death and destruction. At first God tries gentle measures, mild chastisements, then loss and decay in bodily health, family prestige, and national glory; finally, after respite and space for repentance, calamities wear out and destroy the impenitent. "For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool."

HOMILETICS.

National Sickness and Spurious Remedies.—*Verse* 13.

At length Ephraim saw the sickness within and felt the wounds inflicted from without. But instead of returning to God, they sought help from Assyria, "sent to King Jared," but were grievously disappointed. Idolatry and corruption, apostasy from God, could not be cured with earthly bandages. The whole head was sick, and the heart faint. The wounds and bruises and putrefying sores could not be closed, bound up, nor mollified with worldly alliance. God had stricken them, and he only could cure them, but they refused to return (cf. Is. i. 6; Jer. v. 3). In the moral condition of Israel we have a picture of humanity.

I. Men are morally sick. The heart is depraved, "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Sin impairs the energy of the mind, and robs the soul of enjoyment and bliss. The political head and the moral heart of nations are sick and wounded. The politics, the philosophy, and the religion of the world require moral purity and spiritual health. Ceaseless activity without and unspirituality within crave for satisfaction and God. The life-blood is impure, the very heart is diseased, and the evils of the day are the expressions, the signs of its moral maladies. Everywhere we have sighs of the heart, efforts of the mind, and strivings for forms of liberty, states of life, and conditions of happiness which are considered the true harmony of moral being, the panacea for moral ills. 1. *This sickness must be seen.* Ephraim did not at first discern his condition. Men are often insensible to disease, take little warning of Divine judgments, until they are roused by some sudden stroke. Men may fancy themselves healthy because insensible; but apathy may suppress the natural feeling and cravings of the heart. A sound body suffers pain, if injured; but a frame benumbed by sickness or death has lost all feeling. "Health has no feeling of sickness," says Augustine, "but yet it feels pain when it is wounded. But stupidity feels no pain; it has lost the feeling of pain; and the more insensible, so much the worse." 2. *This sickness must be seen in its true light.* According to our view of afflictions so we think and act. They are designed to teach reflection and humility; to strengthen penitence, faith, and patience; to promote the health and sanctification of the soul. But if we see the distress and not the causes of it; if we feel no guilt, no need of a physician; then our temper is soured, our lot embittered, we forsake the true remedy, and pine away and die. **II. Men morally sick often seek wrong remedies.** "Then sent Ephraim to the Assyrian." This only invited the enemy into their kingdom and increased their distress. After they had paid money and spent all they had they were no better, but worse. Mark v. 26. 1. *Individuals often fly to wrong sources.* Music and merry company, novels and scenes of amusement, are tried in vain, and found to be miserable comforters with all their attractions. Impressions remain, the conscience is still wounded and disappointment is the result. 2. *Nations suffering heavy calamities trust to impotent remedies.* Commercial prosperity, military prowess, political liberty, and intellectual culture, may uphold the outward show, but can never cure the inward disorders of a kingdom. In national judgments, amid general dissolution of manners, reliance on arts and arms, wealth and allies, will not save us. The experience of Ephraim will be the result of all application to an arm of flesh. "Yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound." **III. When men in moral sickness apply to wrong means for relief they will be disappointed.** Human aid will be useless when God is slighted; the philosopher and the legislator, the warrior and the poet, will not avail. "Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous." *Scripture* is emphatic on this point. "Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it" (Is. xxxvi. 6; Ezek. xxix. 6, 7). "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Is. ii. 22.) "It is better to trust in the Lord

than to put confidence in princes." "Put not your confidence in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help." *History* gives warning sufficient. Nations that have relied upon human genius, arms and confederacies, have failed in efforts to remedy their evils. Unholy alliance with Egypt and Assyria could not preserve Israel from their doom. Policy without principle, alliance without God, shall be broken. Moral maladies can only be cured by moral means. There is but one physician, all others are physicians of no value. "I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand."

DESTRUCTION OPEN AND VIOLENT.—*Verses* 14, 15.

God, who had been as a "moth" gradually eating away and destroying the nation, would now change his procedure, and attack as a fierce lion, tear to pieces, and none could rescue. If nations take no heed to small judgments they cannot escape great ones. The lion, an image of strength, seizes its prey, and carries it away in safety (Is. v. 29). As the lion withdraws into its cave, so God withdraws his help, and retires from Israel until they repent and seek his face. **I. God's judgments are often severe.** "I, even I will tear." Here are no soft metaphors. The destruction is most painful and severe. Like a lion or an eagle God tears to pieces; tears the garment, tears body and soul. Punishment sometimes falls upon men like wild beasts upon their victims, to crush and destroy. The lion is cruel and ferocious; rends its prey (Deut. xxxiii. 20; Ps. vii. 2); and carries it in triumph to its den (Nah. ii. 12). This is not an overdrawn picture of danger and the anger of God against presumptuous sins. "Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." **II. God's judgments are often irresistible.** "None shall rescue him." The shepherd can neither defend nor interfere. In a trial of strength God is omnipotent and cannot be overcome. Assyria was no protection to Israel. In national calamity none can plead. At the day of wrath no hope, no refuge can be found without God. **III. God's judgments are often irrevocable.** "I will go and return to my place." None can ward off Divine judgments; none can bring back when God retires from men. When God deserts a society or a people, the mightiest and most learned are no defence. Noble institutions, religious ordinances, and great men, wealthy citizens and abundant revenues, are not the chief strength, the real power of a nation. God can consume these like a flower, and no fasting nor penitence can purchase favours once withdrawn. Riches melt, power decays, and happiness turns to misery before the wrath of God. Nothing can revive a nation when God destroys it; nothing can change his purpose when carried out in his providence. To be forsaken of God at any time is awful woe; but in trouble to have his countenance turned from us and against us, to have frowns instead of smiles, must be hell, and not heaven. "When distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 13. Man cannot have two objects of trust—God and himself, or fellow-man. Half of salvation cannot be ascribed to one and half to the other. To put confidence in man, and expect him to do what God alone can do, is idolatry or departure from God, cleaving to the cistern and forsaking the fountain, leaning upon a broken reed which will fail and pierce the hand. The power, the kindness, and the faithfulness of man are helpless. God alone should be our hope and trust (Jer. xvii. 7).

Ver. 14. When we strengthen ourselves in sin by outward helps against the providence and corrections of God, we challenge him to a trial of strength, turn the "moth" into a "lion," and bring greater judgments upon ourselves. God can tear a nation to pieces by sword,

famine, and civil discord. "What is stronger than a lion?" "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Ver. 15. *God's retirement from men. I. The cause.* Offended at sin, driven away by men forgetting and forsaking him. Sin separates between God and man, and hides his face from us. *II. The design.* "Till they acknowledge their offence," &c. 1. To lead to repentance, sorrow, confession and forsaking of sin. 2. To bring back to God. "In their affliction they will seek me early." The desertion is not always final nor total. God withdraws his aid in duty and his comforts in life not to cast off entirely, but to beget penitence and hope, to induce return and amendment of life. "*We* smart under dreadful desertions. Some of us have had to cry with the Master on the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' We know why he has forsaken us: it is because we have forsaken him, and therefore he has hidden the light of his countenance from us until we could scarcely believe ourselves to be his children at all. We have turned to prayer, and found words and even desires fail us when on our knees. We have searched the Scriptures with no consolatory result: every text of Scripture has looked black upon us; every promise blockaded its ports against us. We have tried to raise a single thought heavenward, but have been so distracted under a sense of the Lord's wrath, which lay heavy upon us, that we could not even aspire for a moment; we could only say, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Why art thou disquieted within me?' Such suffering of soul will often be to the erring Christian the very best thing that could befall him. He has walked contrary to his God, and if his God did not walk contrary to him he would be at peace in his sin; and remember, no condition can be more dangerous, not to say damnable, than for a man who is no longer agreed with his God to believe that all is well, and go on softly and delicately in the way which tends to destruction" [*Spurgeon*].

True repentance, in its first step, leads to conviction of sin, confession of guilt, and acceptance of punishment as due to our sin. Then to seek the face of God. "Without the latter, despair, not repentance, would be the result, as in the case of Judah's remorse. Without the former step, to seek God's face would be presumption." Unsanctified affliction only hardens, but blessed, will lead the chastened penitent earnestly and diligently to seek and serve God.

True seekers after God. 1. They seek him, sensible of their distance and their guilt. 2. They seek him when they do not enjoy him. 3. They seek him (*a*) early, i.e. diligently. Former negligence is followed by double diligence; (*b*) earnestly intent on finding God; (*c*) perseveringly, though he has withdrawn from them. They seek until they find him. "All these duties required in right seeking of God ought to be especially set about in sad times. Times wherein affliction press men hard on all hands ought to be times of seeking God indeed, and ought to put an edge on diligence and duties, otherwise it may draw to a sad account" [*Hutcheson*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1—3. Inferiors are very apt to be formed up according to the mould and manners of those above them. The example of kings and princes are seldom unconformed to by their subjects. There is a great power in example; what is done persuades, as well as what is spoken. And *the errors of those that rule, become rules of error;* men sin with a kind of authority, through the sins of those who are in authority. *Jeroboam made Israel to sin*, not only by commanding them to worship the calves at Dan and Bethel, but by commending that idolatrous worship to them in his own practice and example [*Caryl*].

The common people are like tempered wax, easily receiving impressions from the seals of great men's vices; they care not to sin by prescription, and damn themselves with authority [*Harding*].

Ver. 4. Nothing but the hand of God can hold man from ruining himself. The heart of man is so set upon sin, that he would rather lose his soul than his lusts. 'Tis as easy to stay the motion of the sun, or to turn back the course of nature, as to stay or turn back the natural motion or course of the heart in sinning. An almighty power must do the latter as well as the former [*Caryl*].

Other tyrants can but tyrannize over our bodies, but sin is a tyrant over body and soul. It is the worst and greatest tyrant in the world. It hath a kind of jurisdiction in most men's hearts: it sets up the law of pride, the law of passion, the law of oppression, the law of formality, the law of carnal reason, the law of unbelief, and strictly commands subjection to them. Other tyrants have been brought down and brought under by human power, but this cannot, except by Divine [*Brooks*].

Ver. 5—7. Our consciences (which are God's) keep a record, write our lives and count our steps. Many cannot read the book of conscience, and so know little that is in it. But a time will come (if conscience be not purged by the blood of Christ) when they shall perfectly read all their sins in this book within; and if conscience, which is God's deputy, testifieth against sin and marketh it, how much more God, who is the Judge of conscience. God needs not judge upon information, but upon observation. He will reprove every man whom he doth not pardon, and is able to set before us in order whatsoever any of us have done [*Caryl*].

Though repentance be never too late, yet late repentance is seldom true [*Brooks*]. Mercy, in this the day of her reign, sovereignly seizes judgment before its time, and works that mighty lever to move mankind. The terrors of the Lord are not permitted to sleep unnoticed and unknown, till the day when they shall overwhelm and overflow all his enemies; they are summoned forth in the interval, and numbered among the all things that work together for good. Though kept like a reserve in the rear, their grim hosts are exposed to view, in order that they may co-operate with kindlier agencies in persuading men to yield, and fight against God no more [*Arnot*].

Ver. 8—11. Brainerd had such intense compassion for souls, and was so earnest for their salvation, that he said, "I cared not where or how I lived, or what hardships I went through, so that I could but gain souls to Christ. While I was asleep I dreamed of these things, and when I awoke the first thing I thought of was this great work. All my desire was for the conversion of the heathen, and all my hope was in God." It is amazing what difference heat makes on both mental and material objects. The only difference between ice and steam is, that the one has less and the other more heat. Now earnestness converts ordinary qualities into powerful and elastic forces. It enhances everything it touches, turns bricks to marble, and copper into gold. It changes liking into love, joy into ecstasy, and expectation into hope. It stamps on every virtue its currency, whether in heaven or in earth. Love, pity, kindness are all cold and worthless unless they bear the impress of a fervent spirit [*Dulce Domum*].

Ver. 11—14. Vice is sometimes punished instantly and sometimes gradually. This seems to be the method of Divine procedure. We have slow and rapid consumption in the bodies of men. We have the gradual decay and the sudden overthrow of empires, the seed-time of evil and the harvest of judgment. The changes of circumstances are so various and frequent, so great and sudden, that the same person, the same people, afford an example of the greatest prosperity and the greatest misery. Henry the Fourth of France was despatched by a sacrilegious hand in his carriage, in the midst of popular applause and the triumphs of peace. Like Herod, the grandson of Herod the Great, he found but one step between adoration and oblivion. The ruin which God inflicts upon the impenitent and presumptuous sinners is often beyond precedent most sudden and most fearful. What folly, then, to trust in man, when God can easily destroy him!

Ver. 15. To afflictions, instrumentally, many have to date the awakening and conversion of their souls. "Happy is that condition which forces us to trust in God only, and to be in the hand of his providence. Afflictions dispose us to pray; and we are sure to want nothing if we find God in prayer" [*Bishop Wilson*].

CHAPTER VI.

Critical Notes.—1.] Contains an appeal addressed by Israelites one to another. **Some, as spoken by the prophet to the exiled and smitten people. 2. Two days.**] A proverbial way of expressing the certainty of an event in the time specified, primarily applied to the conversion of Is.: in fulness only realized in the resurrection of Christ. **3. Then**] i. e. the consequence of following, hunting and zealous seeking after, would be knowledge in its practical results (ch. iv. 16; Jer. xxii. 15,16). **Going forth**] Heb. rising, applied to the sun (Ps. xix. 23; Gen. xix. 23); setting forth transition from night to day; the dawn of salvation before the orbed glory of heaven (Is. liii. 8; lx. 2). **Prepared**] Lit. fixed, certain as the morning, an established law of nature, a special appointment of God (Gen. viii. 22). **The rain**] Reviving and refreshing blessings (Deut. xxxii. 2; Is. lv. 10). **The latter**] Lit. the crop-rain which fell in the middle of March or April to ripen the grain for harvest. **Former**] Spring rain, which fell from middle of Oct. to middle of Dec. Rain generally, and these two specially, promised by God (Deut. xi. 14); great blessings, without which would happen the greatest calamity in Pal. The blessings of Messiah are compared to rain (Ps. lxxii. 6; 2 Sam. xxiii. 4). **4.**] Begins a bitter complaint. **What**] Both in mercy and judgment (Is. v. 4). God was constant and kind, Is. inconstant. **Goodness**] Godliness, Heb. mercy, kindness, all virtues towards God and man; love which fulfils the law (Rom. xiii. 10). **Morning cloud**] Evanescent and uncertain. **Dew**] Generated by the cold of the night, it appears with the dawn; yet appears only to disappear. The Jewish people a type of many amending and relapsing. God's mercy is first set forth, and then men are upbraided for neglecting it, committing those sins which will be their ruin. Israel's piety was "quickly assumed and quickly disused." **5. Hewed**] Cut off, cut down like a tree (Is. x. 15); or to hew out a stone into the right shape. Israel was obdurate, and was hewed by the prophet, and hammered with the word (Jer. xxiii. 29). **Slain**] The word has power to kill and to make alive (Is. xi. 4; xlix. 2). "The stone which will not take the form which should have been imparted to it, is destroyed by the strokes which should have moulded it" [*Pusey*]. **Thy judgments**] Lit. that thy judgments might be as the light. Penal justice is conspicuous, clear as the sun; every one should take heed (Zeph. iii. 5); lightening (Hender. trans.; cf. marg. Job xxxvii. 3, 15). **6. Sac.**] which they brought. **Mercy**] which they lacked; a comparison by negatives; things less worthy are rejected. Moral obedience is better than ritual offerings (Mat. ix. 13). **Knowl.**] experimental and practical, which is more than empty service. Internal is put before external worship; the prophet, a teacher and interpreter of the law, rebukes apostasy. **7. They**] Eph. and Jud., God's professed people. **Like men**] Lit. like Adam in covenant relation to God, have wilfully transgressed, are guilty of a breach of fidelity. Others, like men generally, who break lightly every day compacts with their fellows. God sought to preserve Adam and Israel in intimate relation to himself. Sin is a violation of the covenant—Israel contradicted their destiny as the people of God. **There**] Wherever and whenever sin is committed, the place is known to God and pointed out by the Divine finger. **8. Gilead**] A city of refuge, the residence of priests, and the centre or metropolis of the hilly region beyond Jordan, yet polluted and the leader of ruin! **9.**] Even priests acted like predatory bands, to murder and surprise travellers on the way. Destruction was met where safety was sought. **By consent**] Lit. with one shoulder, as oxen yoked together (Zeph. iii. 9). The sanctity of the place and the privileges of the priesthood did not check them in banding together for mischief. **Lewdness**] Heb. from a root to form deliberate purpose; deliberate crime, enormity (Marg.). "The word literally means, a *thing thought of*, especially an evil, and so, deliberate wickedness, bethought of and contrived. They did deliberate wickedness, gave themselves to do it, and nothing else" [*Pusey*]. **10. Horrible thing**] Heb. from a word meaning to shudder, be astonished. **Whoredom**] spiritual and literal singled out as the chief sin—"In another nation, idolatry was error. In Israel, which had the knowledge of the one true God, and had received the law, it was horror" [*Pusey*]. **11. Harvest**] Not a harvest of joy, a promise of ingathering of Israel, but a ripeness for Divine judgments to be inflicted by Assyrians. **When**] I would, upon their repentance, have turned away the captivity of my people. Judgment might have been averted, but will end in captivity. The Heb. is used of restoration also (Deut. xxx. 3; Ps. xiv. 7); hence many take it in this sense, as in harmony with the beginning of the chapter—"a promise of restoring their captivity in due time, which yet imports a sentence of banishment for sin to be inflicted before" [*Hutcheson*].

HOMILETICS.

NATIONAL AMENDMENT.—*Verses* 1—3.

Man's miseries are often messengers of mercy. When mild measures did not move Israel, God tried severe. Vengeance came at length, and they were carried captives by a cruel people, brought to a penitent state of mind, and they resolve to return to God.

I. Return to God is a necessity. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." An intimate acquaintance and fellowship with God are a moral necessity. Man cries for God as Father, Friend, and Helper. 1. *Man has capacity to turn to God* and *enjoy him.* He has power to discern right and wrong; to recognize the character and appreciate the claims of God. We have reason, conscience, and a moral nature. Though fallen and sinful, we have not lost our religious cravings and necessities. "The notion of a God," says Tillotson, "is so inseparable from human nature, that to obliterate the one you must destroy the other." The word of God appeals to our helpless condition, and invites us to return to God. The grace and the Spirit of God are promised to aid us in returning. Our life and enjoyment consist in friendship with God. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee." 2. *Man lives in distance from God.* Not a mere natural, but moral distance; an alienation of heart and life from God. In affection and purpose, in thought and deed, man is at variance with his Maker. To be absent from a friend is grief, to be without food and shelter is sad; but to be without God is the greatest infelicity. "Having no hope and without God in the world." 3. *Man suffers in distance from God.* Sin wounds the spirit and brings judgments upon the life. It vexes and enslaves; torments the conscience, and exposes to condemnation and death. Like Ezekiel's roll, within and without it has written, "Lamentation and mourning and woe." From its guilt springs fear; shame from its defilement; and destruction from its punishment. "It is that which puts thee out of the possession and enjoyment of thyself, which doth alienate and separate thee from God, the fountain of bliss and happiness, which provokes him to be thine enemy, and lays thee open every moment to the fierce revenge of his justice." Man has felt his distance and his misery, but could not heal his diseases and restore himself to God. Bleeding and burdened, the soul longs for restoration to its centre. "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!" **II. Return to God is encouraged.** "Come, and let us return," says the prophet. 1. *Mercy is held out.* "He will heal us" and "he will bind us up." The Assyrian could not heal, but they are persuaded that God who had smitten them could. He was Israel's physician in the time of Moses, and preserved them from the diseases of Egypt, the death of the first-born, and the destruction which overtook Pharaoh. No sickness baffles his skill. He gives efficacy to medicine for the body, and his grace renews and sanctifies the soul. As Christ drove out demons and diseases from men, so God heals all our infirmities of body, mind, and heart, until sin is eradicated, and "the inhabitants shall no more say, I am sick." 2. *The certainty of this mercy is relied upon.* "After two days will he revive us." The time is short, but God who promises will fulfil the promise. None need hesitate or despair of God's mercy. It is offered to all, and may be received with faith. A firm persuasion of mercy will draw the penitent to God; without this he would despair or go from him. But the torn shall be healed, the dead quickened, and the humble and contrite received. "We shall live in his sight." His face will no longer be turned away in displeasure nor anger. The returning sinner, who seeks his face, shall know God's will, feel his love, and rejoice in the light of his countenance. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee." **III. Return to God should be urged as a social duty.** "Come, and let us return." We should not only seek God ourselves, but try to induce others; in times of sorrow urge repentance, and of

revival incite to duty. The sympathy of numbers is great. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." In business and common themes men unite and take counsel; should not Christians aid and mutually cheer each other? Sin has separated men or debases their intercourse; but religion unites them in love and confidence. Jewish doctors say that men are to go in haste and with speed together to the synagogue, but return very leisurely. So we should "walk in company," and with enthusiasm to God, but never forsake him. This duty is urged for many reasons. 1. *All have need to be stirred up.* The careless and impenitent must be roused from slumber, the inquirer directed, and Christians excited to greater love and activity. "That they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent." 2. *As social creatures we can influence one another for good.* Example is most potent. Precept points out the way, but example carries us along. Great is the power of goodness to charm and command. The pious man is a king, drawing all hearts after him. We all love the brave and the magnanimous; derive inspiration from them; and incited to action by them. "We live in an age that hath more need of good examples than precepts," said George Herbert. And entering upon the duties of life he resolved: "Above all, I will be sure to live well, because the virtuous life of a clergyman is the most powerful eloquence, to persuade all who see it to reverence and love, and at least to desire to live like him." 3. *It should be our aim to stir up others to do good.* The humblest and most obscure may do this. Wealth and position are not necessary. A warm heart will create and communicate enthusiasm, energy and zeal will evoke courage and devotion in the cause of God. If we return to God others will follow our example. By prayer and holy life we may persuade men and help on that happy time when "the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts; I will go also" (Zech. viii. 21). **IV. Return to God will result in great blessings to a people.** "Bliss from the Creator and duty from the creature answer to one another," says a writer. We live in love, action, and God. Life is a delight and success in the degree in which it is consecrated to God. The greatest happiness is found in God's presence and service. 1. *Quickened life.* He "will revive us." "He will raise us up." Spiritual death is overcome by God's grace. The sinner is raised from a death of trespasses and sins; the saint is revived in heart, hope, and duty. Action begets strength, and faith leads to conversion from sin and deliverance in trouble. Spiritual life is first imparted, then supported and increased. "For in him we live, and move, and have our being." 2. *Practical knowledge.* "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord." True knowledge is obtained by experiment. Experiment is a test of scientific truth. In Chemistry it is a guide, discoverer, and test. The existence of light, heat, and electricity is indebted to it. Christianity claims to be tested by experiment, and when thus tested it is found to be true. No learning and wealth are required. Love, and you shall know God; believe, and you shall feel. "If any man *will do* his will, he *shall know* of the doctrine, whether it be of God." This know is (*a*) experimental, (*b*) practical, and (*c*) progressive; beginning in the heart, manifest in the life, seen in duty and daily progress. 3. *Constant fertility.* "He shall come unto us as the rain;" in its refreshing fertilizing showers. The early and latter rain, beginning the good work in the heart, carrying it on in the Christian Church, and reviving it in the nation. Both are required and given; rain from the first to the last; one shower falling after another upon thirsty pastures and desert ground, filling the pools and clothing the hills with verdure. "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth."

Man's Highest Social Action.—*Verse* 1.

Man as a member of society has much to do with his fellow-men; he should contribute to the advancement of general knowledge, to the progress of political purity

and freedom, and to the augmentation of the general health and comfort of the kingdom. But there is a higher work than this for him in society: it is that of *stimulating* the community to which he belongs "to return unto the Lord." Taking the words in this application they imply—I. That society is *away from God.* Not *locally*, for the Great Spirit is with all and in all, but morally. Away from him in its *thoughts;* it practically ignores his existence and claims. Away from him in its *sympathies:* its heart is on those things which are repugnant to his holy nature. Away from him in its *pursuits:* its pursuits are selfish and carnal gratifications and aggrandizements. Far gone, in truth, is society from its centre—God. It is like the prodigal in "a far country." II. That estrangement from God is *the source of all its trials.* Because the prodigal left his father's home he was reduced to the utmost infamy and wretchedness. Moral separation from God is ruin. Cut the branch from the root, and it withers; the river from its source, and it dries up; the planet from the sun, and it rushes to ruin. Society has left God, its root, source, centre,—hence the terrible evil with which he by his government "hath torn" it. Nothing will remove its evils but a return to God. Legislation, commerce, science, literature, art, none of these will help it so long as it continues from him. III. That *return to Him is a possible work.* Were it not there would be no meaning in the language, "Come and let us," &c. With some estranged spirits in the universe a return may be impossible for ever; not so with human spirits on earth. There is a way, a true and living way, by which all may return; repentance towards God and faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Conclusion. Who are the greatest social benefactors? Those who are the most successful in exciting and stimulating their fellow-men to come back to God, the Great Father of love who awaits their return. He says, "Come now, let us reason together," &c. To bring society back to God is pre-eminently the work of the gospel minister; to this he consecrates his power, his time, his all [*The Homilist*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 3. We *follow on*, confessing that it is he who maketh us to follow him, and draweth us to him. We know, in order to follow; we follow, in order to know. Light prepares the way for love. Love opens the mind for new love. The gifts of God are interwoven. They multiply and reproduce each other, until we come to the perfect state of eternity. For we know in part only; then shall we know, even as we are known [*Pusey*].

I. *The end in view*—to "know the Lord." It is objected that we cannot know him. We are only finite creatures: he is infinite and omnipotent. We cannot know God perfectly, only in part. None by searching can find out God to perfection. But God has revealed himself in his works, word, and Son. 1. We are capable of knowing and loving God. 2. The knowledge of God is a moral necessity. "My people perish for lack of knowledge." 3. A personal, practical, and experimental knowledge of God should be our aim

II. *The method of attaining this end.* "If we follow on," &c. 1. We must not be satisfied with present attainments. "This one thing I do," &c. 2. We must meditate more. Study the works and ways, the word and Christ of God. "Some have not the knowledge of God; I speak this to your shame." 3. We must practise more. This a law of nature. To get more you must use what you have. "To him that hath shall be given," &c.

III. *The success guaranteed.* If we follow on to know, "then shall we know." 1. It is not a vain pursuit. 2. Success is promised. 3. Success is realized. This proved from personal experience and the fulfilment of God's word. If probability actuates men in pursuits of earth, how earnestly should we follow God, who gives such blessings and gain.

Whether we consider these words as an excitement and encouragement addressed by the godly to one another, or

to their own souls, they remind us of an important aim; a necessary duty; and an assured privilege. The *aim* is "to know the Lord." Nothing can be moral or religious in disposition and act, that is not founded in knowledge; because it must be destitute of principle and motive; and the Lord looketh at the heart. Real repentance must spring from proper views of the evil of sin in Christ. Faith is impossible without knowledge. It is not a philosophical knowledge of God as the Almighty, the maker and upholder of all things; nor a knowledge of him as holy in his ways and righteous in his works. Such views would gender dread and aversion in the mind of the sinner. The grand thing is to know that he is reconcilable, and that he has given proofs of his love in Christ. Neither is this knowledge speculative, but experimental. The necessary *duty* is "to follow on" to know the Lord. This includes the practice of what we already know. Neglect only increases sin and condemnation. It also includes diligent use of appointed means. Hearing and reading the word, and prayer. It means perseverance in this course. Nor shall this be *in vain*. "Then shall we know," &c. The privilege is *sure* as the word of God, confirmed by history and experience, can make it. Let this full assurance of hope influence us *first* in regard to ourselves. Keep the way. Perplexities will be solved and doubts removed. Ye shall know more of him in his word, providence, and grace; more of him as the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever. *Second*, in regard to others. Be not impatient if they cannot embrace your views. In grace, as in nature, there must be infancy before manhood. God will enlighten them and finish his work. If their heart be broken off from sin and the world, and they are asking the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, they shall not err therein. "Who hath despised the day of small things?" [*Jay*].

God as the morning. I. *Prepared as the morning.* It is fixed and regulated in its hours—prepared and in readiness. Nothing can hinder its rising. "Seed time and harvest," &c. II. *Gradual as the morning.* Light comes in no haste. God is never in a hurry. What a difference between the dawn of light and perfect day! Fretfulness and impatience will only cloud its brightness and darken the soul. III. *Silent as the morning.* Silent in its progress and influence; gliding over city and hill, glittering on the dew-drops, and brightening the landscape all around. IV. *Joyous as the morning.* Night a time of fear and danger; the sun brings morning and revives all nature. The birds sing, flowers open, our health and spirits are improved. "Truly the light is sweet," &c.

God as rain. 1. Divine in its origin. 2. Refreshing in its nature. 3. Comprehensive in its end. The early and latter rain, as the beginning and end; the sum and substance of Christian experience and national revivals. "Both together stand as the beginning and the end. If either were withheld the harvest failed. Wonderful likeness of him who is the beginning and the end of our spiritual life; from whom we receive it, by whom it is preserved unto the end; through whom the soul, enriched by him, hath abundance of all spiritual blessings, graces, and consolations, and yieldeth all manner of fruit, each after its kind, to the praise of him who hath given it life and fruitfulness" [*Pusey*].

Christ the Day-Dawn and the Rain. Looking upon his personal coming, as represented by the *morning*, and his coming in the Holy Spirit as symbolized by the *rain*, we have—I. *The common resemblances which they have.* 1. The same manifest origin. 2. The same mode of operation on the part of God. 3. The same form of approach to us. 4. The same object and end. II. *The points of distinction between them.* 1. A general and yet a special aspect. 2. Constant and yet variable. 3. With gladness, yet also with trouble. 4. But they tend to a final and perfect union [*John Ker*].

HOMILETICS.

JUSTICE OR MERCY?—*Verses* 4, 5.

These words express intense love, parental discipline, and reluctance to punish any more. God hesitates, seems perplexed, and condescends to ask the sinner himself, to specify a mode of treatment which will answer the purpose. "What shall I do?" When justice was about to punish it was prevented by repentance. When mercy was about to bless it was hindered by fickleness and relapse. God's kindness was constant, but their goodness was evanescent as the dew. "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" Nothing more to bring Israel to himself could he have done, therefore nothing remains but to adopt the treatment mentioned. God knows best what will answer the end in view.

I. Justice and Mercy had failed. Warnings had been given and judgments had fallen heavily upon the nation, but that did not answer. Mercy had shone forth in all its splendour, like the noon-day sun, but that prevailed not. Gentle means did not win them. The greater his favours, the more they forgot him and sacrificed to other gods. Then vengeance came, and they were torn by the enemy and carried into captivity. This is a picture of many whom God has blessed with mercy upon mercy. Long health, continued prosperity, and all the world calls good, have been poured out upon them. Their cup has run over. But they have forsaken God and abused his mercies. Now he is changing his ways with them. Health has decayed, business has failed, children have been taken in youth and hope, and all is black and threatening. "His wrath lieth hard upon me, I cannot look up." But do not envy, and misconstrue this chastisement. There is goodness and loving-kindness in this treatment. It is designed to draw you to God and wean you from sin. "It lightens the stroke," said an afflicted Christian, "to draw near to him who handles the rod." **II. Mercy was withheld.** Their goodness was like the morning cloud and early dew; which promised only to disappoint. Mercy was withheld, from their false and hypocritical conduct. 1. *They were vain in their pretences.* Professing to worship God and offer sacrifices, when their hearts were far from him. Their religion was outward show and formality, empty sound and waterless as a cloud. Like the morning cloud, full of colour, yet driven away by the heat of day. Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, in origin, principle, and aim, you "shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." 2. *They were fickle in their principles.* Sound principles are a necessity in life. Without principles a man is like a cloud driven by every gust of wind; like a ship without rudder or compass, drifted hither and thither by every tide. There can be no rule, order, or government without true principle. "Moral principles," says Hume, "are social and universal. They form, in a manner, the part of humankind against vice and disorder, its common enemy." But the goodness of some is like the "early dew," sparkling as diamonds for a while, but not to last. Reverence and religion disappear in extremes; we have the form, but not the power of godliness. 3. *They were unstable in their conduct.* Repenting and relapsing; smitten and returning; resolving and forgetting; ever beginning and never finishing. There was a fair show of leaves, but not any fruit. Most men are good for a time. In visitation from God, at the prayer-meeting or in the class, they are under deep impressions; but these wear away, and the last condition of these men is worse than the first. There must be no sham, but reality. Principle must be powerful and supreme. Goodness must endure under the burning heat of the sun. It is the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever. **III. Justice is the only alternative.** "Therefore have I hewed them," &c. Kings and rulers, prophets and priests, past misery and present mercy, seemed not to influence them. What more shall I do? Iniquities had not exhausted, but only limited God's love. "How often would I have gathered thy children together,

even as a hen gathereth her chickens," &c. There remains nothing but further chastisement in their desperate condition, a just retribution in kind. "Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away" (ch. xiii. 3). 1. *The word which might have saved shall punish them.* (*a*) God would "*hew*" them by the prophets. God's work is identified with that of his servants. The word is the instrument for the accomplishment of his will. The word disturbs in sin and produces conviction; it reproves and corrects, and "like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces," (*b*) God "*slays*" them by the words of his mouth. Denunciations of wrath had disquieted them and broken their spirits. The word had been "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," to slay their hopes and joys. Men will either be better or worse, quickened or slain, under the preaching of the gospel. "To the one we are a savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life." 2. *The judgments which they unheeded shall consume them.* "And thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth." They might have been delightful as the morning, but they shall be terrible as lightning. (*a*) *Clear and visible;* palpable to the senses, and a warning to those who see them. They will break out like day-light upon all men. (*b*) *Just and equitable.* What they deserved, and what they should not murmur at. They despised the mercy, and now they must behold the severity of God. (*c*) *Terrible and severe;* sudden and overpowering as lightning. Christ comes the first time to save, the second to judge and destroy. Duty is clear. The sinner is without excuse. God at last will be a consuming fire.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 4. *Morning cloud.* Evanescent goodness, generated by the chill of affliction, full of promise, but vanishes away. Many in childhood affectionate and beautiful, do not always realize what they promise. Men in sickness and bereavement vow what they do not perform. The evening does not accord with "the morning of life." Dawn does not ripen into day.

Ver. 5. "*Hewed them.*" Moral statuary. What sculpture is to a block of marble education is to the mind and religion to the character and life. The word presents us with—I. *An insight into human nature.* Rough and deformed. Hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. II. *An expression of God's design.* God, the Great Sculptor, seeks to correct, cut into shape and symmetry. To bring "an angel out of the stone," make "corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace," to prepare "lively stones" for his great spiritual temple (1 Pet. ii. 5; Eph. ii. 21). III. *A description of the word.* A hammer wielded by a Divine hand, authoritative and efficient in breaking the rock, the hardest heart, to pieces. Hence (*a*) energetic in its nature, (*b*) varied in its effects, to slay men or make them alive. IV. *A suggestion concerning the ministry.* Ministers have not to soothe men in sin, nor fear to wound the conscience. As hewers of wood and stone-masons, they have to cut and hammer men. They meet with rough stones and obdurate hearts which must be humbled and hammered. Luther said that faithful ministers labour and sweat more in a day than husbandmen do in a month. With hard blows and sharp instruments have they to work, for men neither receive the image nor submit to the will of God.

Judgments as the light. 1. Revealing sin and exposing the works of darkness (Eph. v. 13). 2. Warning men in duty and danger, ignorance and sin. 3. Destroying rebels, on whom they burst with sudden terror. "In this life also God's final judgments are as a light which goeth forth, enlightening not the sinner who perishes, but others heretofore in the darkness of ignorance, on whom they burst with a sudden blaze of light, and who reverence them, owning that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" [*Pusey*].

HOMILETICS.

MERCY AND NOT SACRIFICE.—*Verse* 6.

There are two sides of religion, the outward and the inward. Israel depended upon sacrifices, ritual forms, rather than moral life, the knowledge and love of God. If men offer "sacrifice" to God without joining it with "mercy" to men, or offer it in fanatical zeal and unmercifulness, he will reject it. He prefers "mercy" which contains cheerfulness and self-sacrifice. Looking at these words in their connection, learn—

I. God desires to give mercy rather than accept sacrifice. Israel would give to God rather than seek the healing mercy required. But God will take nothing from them, desires to impart mercy to them. It is for us, first and above all, to seek pardon; confess and forsake sin. "The less is blessed of the better," without any contradiction. God requires no sacrifice from us. Our offerings cannot enrich or bless him. Pagan sacrifices were considered feasts to the gods. "If I were hungry," says God, "I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." He can provide for himself, and will never be suppliant to his own creatures. "The cattle upon a thousand hills" are his gifts, are not our own; and faith in the offering without love in the heart represents God as beholden to man. "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt-offering." No form of burnt-offerings can purchase Divine favour; no banners and music and incense will be acceptable "without truth in the inward parts." God will have mercy and accept a broken spirit. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." **II. God stamps mercy with more value than sacrifice.** God does not reject all, only heartless sacrifices. They must not be neglected nor despised, but offered in the right spirit. Christ commends the scribe for giving due place and proportion to the ceremonial and moral service. Sacrifice is good for its own sake, required by God and reasonable in man. But "go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. ix. 13). The ritual must not be esteemed above the moral. We must not be religious before God and immoral before men; alive to the letter, but dead to the spirit of the law; scrupulous in the formalities, but negligent in the moralities of life. He who finds mercy from God, will be kind and compassionate to men. We must "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God." "The tithing of cummin must not be neglected," says Gurnal, "but take heed thou doest not neglect the weightiest things of the law—judgment, mercy, and faith: making your preciseness in the less a blind for your horrible wickedness in the greater." "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice." **III. Sacrifice must not be substituted for mercy.** No amount of offerings can replace the everlasting principles of morality. But how easy to present the one for "the living sacrifice" of the other. The Corban gift stands in the place of filial piety. The present on the altar atones for the offence to a brother. Love to God whom we have not seen covers charity to man whom we see day by day. Temple service is honoured above godly life, and sacrifice is offered before mercy. God delights in showing mercy, and "earthly power doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice." God is better pleased with the relief of suffering than gold and silver offered in the church. Transient enthusiasm, fashionable benevolence, and party spirit must not supersede love to God and man. The first commandment is like unto the second. One cannot supersede and must not be placed instead of the other. "To love him with all the heart, and all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices." **IV. Sacrifice and mercy must ever be united together.** One is the outward form and fruit of the other. "He who prays as he ought, will endeavour to live as he prays," says Dr Owen. There is a balance of moral as of

natural forces. Religion unites what philosophy could not—supreme devotion to God and paramount obligation to man. Faith and works, piety and charity, contemplation and activity, heaven and earth, are reconciled in Christian life. The life hidden with God is the life that diffuses blessings among men. Without love to man, love to God grows languid. They are inseparable and essential to each other. This union was perfect in the life of Christ, and constitutes the keystone of morality. All true philanthropists have worked in his spirit and carried out his teaching. Howard in the prisons of Europe, Judson in benighted Burmah, and Florence Nightingale in the Crimea, were devoted to God in their sacrifices for humanity. A life of purity is a life of public duty. The man who loves God will not serve his country less. "Allow them to pray to God, they will not fight the worse for it," was said of some. The heat and the light can never be separated from the sun; benevolence to men can never be cut off from love to God. What God has joined together let not man put asunder. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Covenant Breakers.—*Verse 7.*

In this verse we have a reference to the fall of man and the first covenant with Adam. God stood in covenant relation to man. Israel was bound by God's goodness and their own oath. But they sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression. God was constant and faithful, but they were inconstant and treacherous, they broke the covenant. Notice—

I. The guilt of which they were accused. They "have transgressed the covenant." 1. *Out of irreverence to its authority.* If it be only a man's covenant, there is something sacred and binding (Gal. iii. 15). But God's word is supreme and of Divine authority. 2. *In forgetfulness of their own promise and privileges.* Israel solemnly took an oath to keep all the words of the law—not to forsake God; but they sacrificed to other gods, and were base and perfidious in their conduct. Men who break their promise and despise their obligation bring shame and disgrace upon themselves, and deserve not the confidence and esteem of their fellow-men. Truthfulness should shine in every word and deed. **II. The spirit in which they indulged.** "They dealt treacherously." They not only rebelled, but aggravated their guilt by falsehood and treacherous dealing. They disregarded most singular privileges, thought most sacred obligations of no consequence, and covered most heinous sins in the garb of religious forms. They sinned (*a*) wilfully, (*b*) obstinately, and (*c*) deceitfully. "For the house of Judah and the house of Israel have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the Lord."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Transgressing like Adam. 1. Violating sacred obligations. 2. Justifying sin when committed—charging it upon God or their own nature, upon circumstances or fate. "Man, as man, that is as sinful man, desireth that there might be a seal set or a vail put upon all his sins. It is as natural to man to be a sin-coverer as a sin-committer; and he had rather make some poor shift of his own to cover it than go to God (whose privilege and glory it is to cover sin) to have his sin covered. Neither Adam nor the woman denied what they had done; but both thought they were very pardonable in doing it. Both made a confession, yet theirs was a faulty confession. They covered while they acknowledged their sin, and hid it in their bosoms while they held it out upon their tongues. Thus did Adam the first man, and thus do the sons of Adam excuse their sins, and increase their guilt and punishment" [*Caryl*].

HOMILETICS.

A SAD TRANSFORMATION.—*Verses* 8—11.

We have now particular proofs of the charges brought against Israel. Special places, certain persons, and the whole people are faithless and polluted. The best become the worst.

I. **Sacred places become polluted with sin.** Regarding Gilead as a city of refuge, or the country beyond Jordan, it "is a city of them that work iniquity." God had hallowed the place, and made it a city of safety; an institution of heaven designed for special good. But this place of justice and protection, the glory of the land and the centre of distinguished privileges, was polluted with crime. Its inhabitants had stained its name and filled it with blood. Cities are blessed or cursed by the character and conduct of the inhabitants. Wealth and population, genius and prosperity, fade away by vice and debauchery. Great cities may be filled with great sins; exalted to heaven with privileges, they may be cast down to hell for abusing them. Rome and Paris have been by-words, and Nero and Robespierre have left a stain in history. "By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted; but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked." II. **Ministers of religion become abettors of murder.** The priests, who should have been examples of virtue, fostered abominable sins and were guilty of murder. It was their duty to save life, but they killed both body and soul. They were—1. *Cruel in their designs.* They sought to lie in wait and murder pilgrims on their way to the city. 2. *Crafty in their designs.* They plot "as troops of robbers wait for a man." 3. *Deliberate in their designs.* They thought of their schemes, and deliberately adopted and carried them out. 4. *Confederate in their designs.* "By consent." They were one in sympathy, agreed in sentiment, and banded together in purpose. They were taken from the lowest of the people, intruders in office, and were a curse to the land. Of all societies of men, none are more vile and mischievous than ministers corrupted by office or evil. The sweetest wine becomes the sourest vinegar, the whitest ivory burnt becomes the blackest coal; so the best men, the noblest institutions, may be transformed into the most disgraceful and criminal. "Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane." III. **The noblest design perverted to destruction.** The way to the cities of refuge, by God's command, was to be prepared (Deut. xix. 3); clear and kept open without hindrance or danger to fugitives; but it was filled with robbers and tracked with blood. Those who fled for life met with death. What power in the human will and in human conduct to corrupt the ordinances and hinder the designs of God! Means of grace perverted to motives of crime, and sacred places changed to scenes of corruption. The devil gets into the church, and the foulest crimes are committed in the garb of religion and a good name. In Christendom now we see religion made the tool of priests and governments: its sanctions brought to support schemes of aggrandizement and oppression; and plans that display God's wisdom and benevolence employed to prostrate our nature, to pollute the land, and make it "desolate and a perpetual hissing." IV. **A chosen people degraded with punishment.** All these crimes were done "in the house of Israel," an elect nation. Whoredom was widespread, and the whole land was defiled. 1. *The enormity of their sin was great.* "An horrible thing," enough to make one shudder; "a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth shall tingle." Ordinary sins are evil, but the sins of Israel were gross abominations. Sins against light and privileges, the warnings of prophets and the judgments of God. Heathen nations could not commit such crimes, the greatness of which can only be estimated by God. But ancient Israel and modern Churches, pre-eminent above other peoples, exchange God for vain idols. Holy heaven is amazed at the monstrous folly of

men. "Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be ye horribly afraid; be ye very desolate, saith the Lord." 2. *The punishment of their sin was disgraceful.* The people of God were bereft of their glory and defence; carried captives and humbled by a foreign foe. The seed was reaped in an awful "harvest" of punishment by both Ephraim and Judah. God is no respecter of persons—the highest and the lowest, the priest and the peasant, are alike judged for their sins. He makes them "base and contemptible before all the people." Sin sinks the most exalted to the most degraded. It is a blot in the escutcheon of the mightiest nation which no worldly glory can efface. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

The substance of these verses may be summed up in few words. 1. *Man has a tendency to abuse the best and highest things.* This is proved from history, Scripture, and observation. 2. *When the best and highest things are abused they become the worst.* Moral order and distinctions are confounded. A downward course is begun. Conscience must be quieted, moral feelings be suppressed, and bold extravagance required to cover and defend sin. 3. *Abuse of the best and highest things greatly increases the guilt.* When men check religious impulse and resist good they go at a faster rate than merely doing wrong. The effect of sin must be measured by the power of moral sensibility. Perfection of guilt and punishment is gained by using the truth and ordinances of God, to do the bidding of selfishness and lust.

I have seen an horrible thing. God discerns sin when covered by craft and counsel, by excuse and ignorance. The smallest sins and the most horrible crimes are detected by him, and will be discovered to the perpetrators. Men may cover their ways and hide their sins, but they cannot prosper.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1—3. *Conversion.* In conversion the sinner has a deep sense of his distance and desert, a full persuasion that God will forgive and restore him, and perseverance in seeking God. He will strive to return and carry out his resolution like the prodigal, in confession of sin. "I will return to my home; my father will forgive me," said a wandering disobedient son. He was forgiven, and restored to parental favour.

Morning. The morning breaketh forth in crimson, and the beauteous flowers of the field spread wide their odorous cups to drink the blooming influence of the rising genial sun [*G. S. Green*].

Rain. What would nature be without rain? We are entirely dependent on the grace of God. But under the influences of his word and Spirit we revive and grow as the corn. These influences are always needful; but observe, there are two seasons when they are peculiarly experienced. The one is connected with the beginning of the Divine life—this may be called the former rain. The other with the close of it—this may be called the latter rain [*Jay*].

Ver. 4. *Transitoriness.* When Daguerre was working at his sun-pictures, his great difficulty was to fix them. The light came and imprinted the image; but when the tablet was drawn from the camera, the image had vanished. Our lamentation is like his, our want the same, a fixing solution that shall arrest and detain the fugitive impressions. He discovered the chemical power which turned the evanescent into the durable. There is a Divine agency at hand that can fix the truth upon the heart of man,—God's Holy Spirit [*J. Stoughton*].

Ver. 5. I presume the Lord sees I require more *hammering and hewing* than almost any other stone that was ever selected for his spiritual building,

and that is the secret reason of his dealings with me. Let me be broken into a thousand pieces, if I may but be made up again, and formed by his hand for purposes of mercy [*R. Hall*].

Ver. 6. The outward service of ancient religion, the rites, ceremonies, and ceremonial restraints of the old law, had morality for their end. They were the letter, of which morality was the spirit; the enigma, of which morality was the meaning. But morality itself is the service and ceremonial of the Christian religion [*Coleridge*]. The artist may mould matter into forms of surprising beauty, and make us feel their elevating and purifying influences: but what is the marble Moses of a Michael Angelo, or the cold statue of his living Christ, compared to the embodiment of Jesus in the sculpture of a holy life? What are all the forms of moral beauty in the Pharisee of religion, compared with the true and holy life of the heart of the devoted Christian? [*Bishop Thompson*].

Ver. 8—11. *Best and worst.* The best things when abused become the worst: there is no devil like a fallen angel; no enemy to the gospel like an apostate Christian; no hate like the "theological hate;" no war like a religious war; and no corruption like religious corruption. The reasons are not far to seek. The best things are the strongest: they can do most always, most evil when used in an evil way. Bad men know this: Simon the magician was not the only one that has cast a covetous look at Christianity and said, "Give me also this power" [*A. J Morris*].

CHAPTER VII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1.**] Exposure of wickedness continued. **Healed**] politically and morally. The danger of a wound only discovered when probed and healing attempted. **Spoileth**] Heb. strippeth off a garment: plunder extensive and without resistance. **Falsehood**] Deception toward God and man. "Falsehood was the whole habit and tissue of their lives" [*Pusey*]. **2. Consider**] Lit. say not to themselves in serious reflection. **Rem.**] Notice and punish (Deut. xxxii. 34; Ps. xc. 8). **Beset**] as fetters and witnesses against them (Ps. ix. 16; Prov. v. 22). **3. Lies**] People conformed to wicked laws and seductive rites of kings and princes; flattered and pleased them with applause and immoralities (Acts xii. 13). **4. Oven**] "In this passionate career the nation resembled a furnace which a baker heats in the evening and leaves burning all night while the dough is leavening, and then causes to burn with a still brighter flame in the morning when the dough is ready for baking" [*Keil*]. **5. Day** Birth or coronation day, probably a feast day. **Bottles**] Lit. with heat through wine; bottles, not glasses, drunkenness, excess, and debauchery. **Hand**] In token of fellowship, health-drinking. **Scorners**] Ridicule of sacred things, derision of God, natural at intoxicating feasts (Dan. v. 3, 4). **6. Ready**] Lit. applied (marg. brought near) their heart to sin. **For**] The reason for the open sin; their heart is ready, and only waiting for the spark to kindle it. **7. Devoured**] Results of their conduct stated. Judges and kings, inflamed by the passion, here consumed and fell into the abyss, the six last kings in succession (2 Kings xv. 10, 14, 25), B. C. 772. None sought help from God in national calamity. **8. Mixed**] by leagues and adoption of idolatrous customs. The Heb. indicates a mixing which disorders and involves confusion. **A cake**] burned at the bottom and sad at the top,—an image of worthlessness. One side scorched and black, the other unbaked and doughy; the whole spoiled and only fit to cast away. **9. Gray hairs**] Symptoms of age and declining strength. "Thy gray hairs are thy passing bell" [*Pusey*]. Wisdom is not always found with age (Job xxxii. 7; Prov. xxiii. 35). Israel indifferent, though ripe for destruction. **11. Dove**] A type of simplicity (Matt. x. 16). **Silly**] Simplicity. **Without heart**] Lit. without understanding, easily taken in the net (Ezek. xii. 13). **12. Congregation**] *i. e.* the threatenings of the law read to them by teachers in assemblies (Lev. xxvi. 14; Deut. xxviii. 15). **13. Fled**] As birds from their nests (Prov. xxvii. 8; Is. xvi. 2). **Redeemed**] from Egyp first, and constantly afterwards, "habitual, oft-renewed deliverance." *I* and *they* both emphatic. *I* redeemed, *they* lied. God's mercy overflowed man's ingratitude. **14. Cried**] in anguish, not in penitence. **Howled**] in deep affliction and despair. **Assemble**] Crowd together in idol temple to deprecate famine and depart from God. **Rebel**] Lit. withdraw themselves. **Against**] From me; they cast off all allegiance to God. **15. Bound**] Weakened and relaxed, an image from surgery (*chastened*, marg.) "Instructing the arms, according to the analogy of Ps. xviii. 35, is equivalent to showing where and how strength is to be acquired. The Lord has not contented him-

self with merely instructing, he has also strengthened their arms and given them power to fight and victory over their foes (cf. 2 Kings xiv. 25, 26)" [*Keil*]. **16. Deceitful**] Which cannot carry the arrow; too slack or ill-constructed, which the archer fears will miss its aim. **Rage**] Blasphemy against God. **Derision**] Egypt, on which they depended, will ridicule them for their boasting and failure (Is. xxx. 35).

HOMILETICS.

A sad Discovery.—*Verse* 1.

The exposure of moral depravity is continued. The efforts of God to heal are frustrated by the disease. Greater iniquity is discovered. The grace of God is turned into lasciviousness.

I. A disease malignant in its working. 1. *It was secretly hidden.* It broke out in one place when the physician was curing another. "When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered." Sin is never hid from God. It lies concealed in the heart of man, and only waits for a chance to break out in acts. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." 2. *It was openly violent.* The thief cometh in, and the troop of robbers spoileth without. They were infested with thieves within and spoiled by foreign invaders from without. Wounded afresh day by day. No place was secure and free from sin. Secret sins indulged in become stronger and more violent in their manifestations. Spots break out in the character and errors in the life, like some malignant humour in the body. The body is robbed of its beauty, the mind of its vigour, and the life spoiled in its influence and end. **II. A disease complicated in its symptoms.** Within and without, politically and religiously, the disease was spreading. 1. *There was falsehood toward God.* "For they commit falsehood." Falsehood in their worship and profession, in their principles and practices. They said they were willing to be healed and to be ruled by God: "nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues." 2. *There was treachery toward man.* Take away the fear of God and there will be no regard to man. "He cannot be faithful to me who is unfaithful to God," said the father of Constantine the Great. Religion is the basis and cement of society. If we throw off fidelity to truth and God, what is there to bridle passion and check corruption? Treachery destroys all principles of confidence and security by which society is bound together. The Romans even disdained to practise it towards their enemies. How disgraceful for a Christian people to be guilty of it. "Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?" **III. A disease incurable in its nature.** "When I would have healed"—by the teachings of the prophets and the chastisements of Providence—"they would not hearken nor be amended." The disease defied all remedy, was more irritated by it and laid open in its extent and malignity. Many distempered churches and afflicted nations neglect the hopeful crisis, then go from bad to worse, and never get cured. Their wickedness is incorrigible and their disease incurable. When once inwardly rotten and corrupt, the foulness will break out and be externally visible. No earthly physician can sew up or heal the wound. *Death* in the body can never be cured. There is no death so sad and momentous in its results as the death of things which die within. "The greatest epoch in a man's life is by no means the day of his physical death, but the day in which he died to something more important to him than the whole world." "We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed; forsake her."

Divine Remembrance of Sin.—*Verses* 2, 3.

God saw the wickedness of Israel. All things are naked and opened before him. The manifold and intricate ways of sin, with their surroundings and consequences, are known to him. "They are before my face."

I. God remembers the sins of men. "I remembered all their wickedness." These words are full of awful truth, confirmed by Scripture and every-day experience. God is *omnipresent;* beholds us everywhere; and we can never sin with security. If I wished to escape inspection, "whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" God is *omniscient*, having infinite and intimate knowledge of the affairs of men. He needs no light to discern sin, but the light of his countenance. Our open transgressions and secret sins are before his face. "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." But this knowledge is *remembrance.* Not that God ever forgets. Though punishment does not always immediately follow transgression, yet the sin itself is not forgotten or buried in oblivion. God sees and knows it. Men may wink at sin and forget it, but God never does. God's remembrance is—1. *Minute,*—even the most secret things are known to him. 2. *Constant,*—"remember" continually. 3. *Individual,*—"*their* wickedness." 4. *Universal,*—"*all* their wickedness." **III. Men think that God is indifferent to their sins.** "They consider not in their hearts." They forget God, and think that God forgets them. "They say, The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." 1. *Men forget God in their thoughts.* "They consider not." If they acknowledge him in words, they do not wish to have him near to them. They do not speak to their own hearts, nor listen to the voice of conscience within. The young and old, the rich and poor, the gay and busy, shun acquaintance with him—put him in the background of life, and curtain him out of sight lest he should trouble them. They desire not the knowledge of his ways, wish to remain ignorant, and say, "Depart from us." A French philosopher even declared, "that the first duty of an intelligent and free man is to chase incessantly from the mind and conscience the idea of God." Practical atheism abounds now in the world. Men abandon faith in the unseen and spiritual, and virtually say, *No God.* "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God, God is not in all his thoughts." 2. *Men disregard God in their ways.* If God is not in our thoughts he will not be in our ways. Conduct results from thoughts, as fruit from a tree. Thought may not always be embodied in deed; may inadequately be represented by a man's life; but the connection of one with the other is like cause and effect. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." "There are many devices in a man's heart" which lead him to act independently and forgetfully of God. Scientific men talk of "generative powers," "vital energies," and "eternal laws." We have the designs of Balak and Balaam, of Haman and Herod. Men take no account of God in their daily duties and avocations, their plans and pursuits. Self is their oracle and self their counsellor, "for they have perverted their way and forgotten the Lord their God." **III. When men disregard God in their ways, they become more wicked in their lives.** Due regard to God is essential to the order and harmony of society. What a desolation would happen to a world without the knowledge of God! The French Revolution is a lesson to all nations in this respect. The results of idolatry have been sad in the extreme. Even among the chosen people, amid light and privileges, when God was forsaken, every barrier was removed. Falsehood and injustice, cruelty and sensuality, increased more and more. They gave full play to passions and lusts; perpetrated sins without fear or shame; and indulged in unbridled folly. Two things are specially pointed out. 1. *The highest ranks were corrupted.* "They made the *king* glad with their wickedness." Those who should have been models of truth and virtue, encouraged the people to sin by their example and influence. Their unjust laws and customs were eagerly obeyed; they were pleased with the flattery, made glad with the homage of the people. In pomp and unbounded arrogance they proceeded further in sins, like Herod; and not only did the same, but had pleasure in them that did them. 2. *The lowest ranks were servile.* "And the princes with their lies." An unhappy complaisance was the ruling character of Israel. Their consciences were versatile and accommodating to the circum-

stances of the day. They approved and followed whatever was commanded by those in power; acquiesced in legalized idolatry, and preferred their kings to their God. They pleased the king, but they were not sincere. They flattered the prince, but they lied in their hearts. They conformed to the customs, but cursed the persons of their rulers. Even now, men bow in homage to those who crush them to poverty; lose their manhood by worshipping the rich and the mighty. "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." Wicked sovereigns and wicked people are a curse to each other. When kings and princes are corrupted the people will be corrupted. Ahab preferred falsehood to truth, and was surrounded by lying prophets. "Lies will be told to those that are ready to hearken to them." The sinful ruler is a tool for all kinds of wickedness. He drives the godly from his presence, and ever finds those that minister to his folly. "If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked" (Prov. xxix. 12).

Encircled in Sin.—*Verse* 2.

If the sinner pays no regard to reason and the All-seeing eye of God, he cannot hide his sins. They will chain and imprison him, go with him and encircle him at all times. His sins become a constant torment and a deadly punishment. "Now their own doings have beset them about." The sinner is beset—

I. By the sting of conscience. He seeks to hide his sins, but conscience detects them, brings them to remembrance, and accuses him of guilt. The consciousness of sin haunts him continually, and his sin is ever before him. **II. By the force of habit.** Sin by repetition grows into habit. Habit becomes a ruling power, and cannot be given up easily. "A rooted habit," says Tillotson, "becomes a governing principle. Every lust we entertain deals with us as Delilah did with Samson; not only robs us of our strength, but leaves us fast bound." **III. By the influence of example.** The doings of men live before them in their effects upon others. They cannot die, but they encircle them in the bands of associates and companions. Example is repeated and imitated by others; goes forth with self-propagating power, and may descend from one generation to another. "The evil that men do lives after them." **IV. By the consequences of natural law.** Punishment follows sin by a natural law, the law of causation. Even now men are encircled by their own doings, in loss of health and position; in decay of intellect and disorders of mind; in the torments of conscience and the tyranny of habit; in misery, despair, and death. In the future, punishment awaits the sinner. "Is not this laid up in store with me and sealed up among my treasures?" Unless repented of, and washed in the blood of Christ, sins are destined to be cited against the sinner. In time and eternity "his own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins."

Sin a Furnace of Fire.—*Verses* 4—7.

The passion of Israel for idolatry is likened to a furnace, heated by the baker and left burning during the process of fermentation. There is little or no cessation to their indulgence. All are guilty, and fan the flames which consume them without reflection and return to God. Keeping up the figure, sin is like a furnace,

I. In the method by which it is kindled. Man is capable of warmth and enthusiasm. We are made for fervour. We feel the glow of friendship and the power of principles fondly cherished and firmly defended. We have properties not simply attributed to matter, but possessed by the Seraphim of heaven and attributed to God himself. "The *zeal* of the Lord of Hosts." We are more influenced by evil than good. The heart, with its affections, is kindled into a passion; the temperament warmed, and men are "set on fire" with lust, and "set on fire of hell." Like "an oven heated by the baker," they burn with hatred, envy, and adultery; "burned in their lusts one toward another." In whatever

light we look at sin "it is a fire that consumeth to destruction, and would root out all mine increase" (Job xxxi. 12). **II. In the fuel by which it is fed.** The same material that kindles must keep alive the fire. It is heated and fed by lust; by constant and unnatural excitement. Respites only ferment; the flames slumber to break out into greater fury. Anger, ambition, and filthy lusts fill the soul, and the fire burns upon the altar and never goes out. Certain sins are mentioned in the text. 1. *Prevalent adultery.* They are *all* adulterers. "Given up to vile affections, and punished with impurities of heart and life." "It is better to marry than burn" (1 Cor. vii. 9). 2. *Excessive drink.* The princes made the king "sick," heated him "with bottles of wine." Intemperance in any is degrading, but especially in men of place and power. Priest and prophet "err through strong drink" (Is. xxviii. 7; lvi. 11, 12). The glory of Benhadad (1 Kings xx. 16), of Belshazzar, and of "the princes of Israel," was covered with shame. Philip of Macedon, when drunk, unjustly condemned a woman. She boldly said, "I appeal to Philip; but it shall be when he is sober." Roused by the appeal, the king examined the case, and reversed his judgment. "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted" (Prov. xxxi. 4, 5). 3. *Impious scorning.* "He stretched out his hand" in friendship, and associated "with scorners." The king jested with drunkards, praised idols, and scoffed at God. Atheists and scoffers, wine and mirth, are often found together. "Hypocritical mockers at feasts" give license to their tongue, and lose control over their conduct. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." **III. In the results which it produces.** These are innumerable. The temptations to criminality are fearful. Every kind of "wickedness burneth as the fire" (Is. ix. 18). "Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals and his feet not be burned?" 1. *It influences the heart.* "For they have made ready their heart." It hardens and encrusts it; disposes it to prepare, practise, and perfect evil. The heart is brought nigh, stirred up to sin, though the occasion for it be taken away. This oven, once heated, gives no breathing time, no real rest. Corrupt passions burn with intense heat, until extinguished and overcome by the grace of God. 2. *It consumes its abettors.* The fire "devoured their judges; all their kings are fallen." Jeroboam and other kings corrupted the people to establish their own authority; were flattered and slain by those who flattered them. Their sins returned to their own bosom. The flames, like the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, devoured those who were thrown into them and those who kindled them. It is ever thus with sin. The heathens taught that "the artificers of death perished by their own art." "Kindle not the coals of a sinner, lest thou be burnt with the flame of his fire" (Ecclus. viii. 10).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 5. *The day of our king.* Birthdays and coronation-days of rulers; national fasts and feasts spent in drunkenness and rioting—scenes of revelry, scenes of debauchery, scoffing, and murder. Drinking healths and taking lives! Kings falling in feasting and mirth! What a portrait history gives of human folly and God's providence! "Their holy days, like those of so many English now, were days of excess. Their festival they turned into an irreligious and anti-religious carousal; making themselves like the brutes that perish, and tempting their king first to forget his royal dignity, and then to blaspheme the majesty of God" [*Pusey*].

Drink, debauchery, and scoffing a triple association in feasting without God. "Fools make a mock at sin."

Ver. 6. *Their heart like an oven.* Men who are wicked and vile may seem to be lying by and doing nothing, yet—1. Their hearts are bent on their course;

their oven is heating while they sleep. 2. Their designs are still going on; the heat is tending to burning as *a flaming fire* while the *baker sleeps*. 3. Iniquity that is hatched, through abundance of lust, is most violently executed, when opportunity offers; and the more violently that it hath been long delayed [*Hutcheson*].

Ver. 7. *Kings are fallen.* Those who murdered others are murdered themselves. Plots of sin recoil on those who originate them.

None that calleth on me. God can correct the evils and subdue the sedition of a nation. But mark the stupidity and perversity of sin which make people insensible in danger and neglect God in trouble. Not even distress, in which generally men betake themselves to God, awakened any sense of sin in them. "Those are not only *heated* with sin, but *hardened* in sin, that continued to live without prayers, even when they are in trouble and distress."

HOMILETICS.

The Christian Church endangered and injured by Worldly Association. —*Verses* 8, 9.

From the internal corruption, the prophet passes on to the foreign policy of Israel, and unfolds its disastrous effects. God separated the nation to be his peculiar people; to train them up in virtue; and make them a blessing to the world. But they mixed themselves with other nations in social customs and political leagues. In the application of these words learn—

I. That the Christian Church is in danger of unlawful association with the world. "Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people." We are not to shut ourselves out from all intercourse and innocent association with the world. Family ties, business and spiritual engagements, bind us to it. But we must not "be conformed to this world," in its evil customs and pursuits, its principles and spirit. We have no need to go out of the world literally; but keep ourselves from its evil: separate ourselves from its frivolities, and be Christians entirely. 1. *The Christian Church is endangered by outward proximity to the world.* The world is near, present with us, and appeals to our senses. It influences more than things spiritual and unseen. Its wondrous forms and fair pretences gradually get hold upon and eventually overcome the careless professor. Demas-like, he forsakes God, having loved this present world. Its pursuits and demands engross our attention. Before we are aware we are brought under its spell; walking according to rules, and governed by "the prince of this world." 2. *The Christian Church is endangered by the inward tendency to love the world.* There are snares and dangers within us, from natural cravings and corrupt desires. We are fond of its company and eager for its rewards. Its attractions are strong, because resistance is weak; its trifles realities, because we prefer toys to eternal treasures. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." **II. The Christian Church is injured by association with the world.** Contact with it wears away seriousness of mind, indisposes for religious duties, neutralizes religious influence, and expels religious sentiment. Professors who needlessly mix up with sinful practices and company are sure to suffer in their character and condition. The text specifies—1. *Moral deterioration.* "Ephraim is a cake not turned." They had been mixed up and steeped with heathen idolatries and vices, and had become worthless. The fire of Divine judgment made only an outward impression upon them, and they were more hopelessly spoiled by their conduct. Burned on one side and dough on the other, perfectly useless. Many Christians now are utterly worthless in their lives and examples. Many societies have lost their prominence and savour; sunk into degradation, and do not answer the end for which they were created. Inward corruption will never overcome outward temptation. If individuals, churches, and nations do not contain power to prevent deterioration and impart life, they will become

morally insipid, and fit for nothing but the fate which history and Scripture declare awaits them. 2. *Social injury.* "Strangers have devoured his strength." Foreign powers, Assyria and Egypt, whose aid Israel had invoked, robbed them of money, wasted their treasures, and diminished their numbers. Like Samson, bereft of his strength by sensual pleasure, Israel was stripped of social privilege and power. Sad to think of many socially and individually ruined by unlawful connections and sinful lusts. Intellect and memory, dignity and manhood: the health of the body and the happiness of the soul "devoured" by strangers to God and his people! "Evil communications corrupt good manners." 3. *Unnatural decay.* "Gray hairs are here and there upon him." Loss of inward strength and outward beauty will soon bring age and decay. "Men get old before they are young." A general laxity of morals may sap and undermine our commerce. The body politic may be covered with marks of hoary age and ripening for destruction. Christian churches may decay through discord, worldliness, and pride. Families and individuals may fall by sin and die while young. Gray hairs are forerunners and forewarners of death. 4. *Religious insensibility.* "Yet he knoweth it not." To be insensible of disease and decay is the worst symptom of all. Men hide from themselves tokens of death, and it comes upon them unawares. They think that outward forms, orthodox creeds, and the course of time will recover their strength. They are insensible and stupefied in sin, and sleep quietly amid dangers and death. "They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick: they have beaten me, and I felt it not; when shall I awake?" (Prov. xxiii. 35: Is. xlii. 25.)

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 8. *A cake not turned.* Soft and pliable under Divine chastisement, hardened and cold in sin—*half-heartedness*, half-baked and half-burned, displeasing to God—*hypocrisy*, hot in forms, dead in spirit, rejected by God. "Such were the people; such are too many so-called Christians; they united in themselves hypocrisy and ungodliness, outward performance and inward lukewarmness; the one overdone, but without any wholesome effect on the other. The one was scorched and black; the other, steamed, damp, and lukewarm; the whole worthless, spoiled irremediably, fit only to be cast away." "Thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

Ver. 9. *Gray hairs.* I. *Gray hairs are a sign of decay.* God for wise purposes gives distinctive features to human life. Nature teaches us to reverence age in the pages of an old book; in the leafless branches of an old tree; in the silent, deserted halls of an old roofless ruin; still more in one whose head is white with the snows of fourscore or a hundred winters. Gray hairs are associated with—(1) Parental honours, (2) the ripe wisdom of age, and (3) the piety of venerable men. II. But in the text they are signs of decay, premonitory symptoms of dissolution: and *teach that men live in ignorance* and *act in disregard* of signs that should warn and alarm them. 1. This appears in the history of States. In the kingdom of Israel, in England, illegitimacy, drunkenness, continental morality, Sabbath-breaking, and irreligious customs are signs of national decay; which, but for thousands of good and earnest men, who know it, would bring death upon us. 2. This applies to the false security of sinners. 3. This appears in men's insensibility to the lapse and lessons of time [From *Dr. Guthrie*].

I. *Explain the ignorance* here mentioned, or show how it is that many a man is backsliding and declining in grace, and yet knows it not. This is often caused by *a want of acquaintance with one's own soul.* Some there are who *do not want to know any evil thing of themselves* Many see not the gray hairs because they *do not look into the glass to see them.* There are some who look into the glass

to see whether there are gray hairs coming, but *they use a false mirror*, one which does not truly reflect the image. II. I am to *hold up the looking-glass*. One of the gray hairs which marks decay is *a want of holy grief for daily sin*. A second gray hair is *the absence of lamentation in the soul when Jesus Christ is dishonoured*. A third gray hair in the Christian, a very plain one, and marking that the disease is gone far, is *the indulgence of certain minor sins*. *Covetousness* is a very common gray hair upon the heads of professors. With some it is not quite covetousness, but *worldliness*. Another gray hair is *pride*. *Neglect of prayer* another. It is a gray hair when we have *no delight in listening to the word*. And another is, *want of love to God*. *Want of love to perishing sinners* is a sad gray hair to be found, I fear, in some ministers, as well as in the people. Another is *the suspension of communion with God*. III. Recommend *certain remedies* for this decay. Inquire whether you be a child of God or not. Next remember *what will be the result of decays in grace*. I recommend to every believer *a daily self-examination*. Then with repentance join much *supplication* and *renewed faith* and *daily watchful activity* [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 10. *Pride* prevented humility and confession. 2. Return to God, who had afflicted them. 3. Testified against them in their stupidity and rebellion against God. "Men complain of their 'fortune,' or 'fate,' or 'stars,' and go on the more obstinately to build up what God destroys, to prop up by human means or human aid what, by God's providence, is failing; they venture more desperately, in order to recover past losses, until the crash at last becomes hopeless and final" [*Pusey*].

HOMILETICS

The Silliness of the Sinner.—*Verses* 11—13.

Ephraim was stricken and afflicted, stupefied and insensible, because without heart or understanding they revolted against their best interests. Like a silly dove, simple, and liable to be befooled (Job xxxi. 27); easily seduced, and trusting to its rapidity of flight instead of taking the nearest shelter. Israel negotiated with others, depended not upon God, and was caught in the net. Looking at sin generally—

I. The sinner is silly in boasting of knowledge without wisdom. There is a great difference between knowledge and wisdom. The knowledge of this world and the wisdom from above are not always found together. The world may consider men wise and cunning, but a wicked man is not a *wise* man. Sin is folly, and folly denotes insipidity, which is opposed to wisdom derived from tasting or experience. There is no true knowledge without godliness. There may be intellect and useful learning, but men are brutish and foolish through sin. "The ox knoweth his owner," —*we* know not our owner,—"and the ass his master's crib;" but we are insensible of our dependence upon God; "do not know" nor consider. We "lack wisdom." Some are totally ignorant. Others, gifted with genius and erudition, "think highly of themselves." All are liable to be duped by their own fancy or snared by their own understanding. "A head full of vain and unprofitable notions, meeting with a heart full of pride and self-conceit, disposes a man directly to be an atheist," says Philip Henry. Men are silly for boasting of knowledge, and ensnared by leaning to their counsels. "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom: and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job xxviii. 28). **II. The sinner is silly in depending upon human and forsaking Divine aid.** "They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria." 1. They called not upon *God*, who could help them as he had done in the past. 2. They called to *Egypt*, delusive in promising and disappointing in execution. 3. They go to *Assyria*, a powerful oppressor; sought each by turns to help against the other. Thus men, troubled and oppressed, seek relief from one thing and then another, only to display their folly and bring on their ruin. "What else is almost the whole history of Christian states?" asks a writer. "The 'balance of power,' which

has been the pride of the later policy of Europe, which has been idolized as a god, to which statesmen have looked as a deliverance out of all their troubles; as if it were a sort of Divine Providence, regulating the affairs of men, and dispensing with the interference of God; what is it but the self-same wisdom which balanced Egypt against Assyria?" Men flee like a bird from their nest and security (ver. 13), only to be caught in the net of "destruction." **III. The sinner is silly in not discovering his danger.** The dove has neither courage to stay in its resting-place when frightened, nor sense to discern its peril when it flies away. Instead of remaining in protection it flies away and is caught in the net. So men in sin rush from God into risks, seek no place of safety, and have no sense of loss. As "the ox goeth to the slaughter," unconscious of its fate, and dreaming of pasture; "as a fool to the correction of the stocks," careless and unfeeling; "as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life," so blindfolded and silly men go to their fall. They soar upward, "as the fowls of heaven," in freedom, independence, and pride, but the net is "spread upon them." They are humiliated and overwhelmed. 1. *The danger may be seen.* It is open and exposed. The net is spread out to surround them and hold them down. But "man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." 2. *The danger is not without warning.* "Their congregation hath heard." In the law and by the prophets, by judgment and mercy, God had forewarned Israel. So men now sin against light and truth, in the face of God's word and God's providence. If you add blows to reproofs, so incurable is the folly of some that they will not grow wiser and better. "Yet will his foolishness not depart from him."

The Fowler of Retribution.—*Verse* 12.

As they go to Egypt and Asshur for help, God will spread his net over them like a bird-catcher, and bring them down to the earth like flying birds, *i. e.* bring them from the open air—freedom—into the net of captivity or exile. Here the work of retribution is spoken of as the work of the fowler, and includes two things—entrapment and abasement. *I. Entrapment.* The literal reference here is 2 Kings xvii. 4. The retributive providence of God employed Assyrians to ensnare Israel. This entrapment of providence was seen in the case of Joseph's brethren and the crucifixion of Christ. Popery confined Luther in Wartburg Castle, where he translated the Bible, which shattered the whole system. Anglican bigots imprisoned Bunyan in Bedford jail; there he produced a book which has given him immortal fame. The net that entangles sinners is not made in heaven, but on earth, by themselves. Righteous providence permits them so to be ensnared as to render that enthralment painful and lasting. *II. Abasement.* "I will bring them down," &c. However high they may tower, retribution has missiles to bring them down. Men in worldly prosperity, pride and ambition, soar like eagles above the rest. An ancient philosopher, when asked what Jupiter did in heaven, replied, "He pulls down the haughty, and exalts the humble." Read the words—"The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee," &c. (Obad. 3, 4). Ponder well thy condition, sinner. Retributive justice is upon thee wherever thou art and whatever thou dost. If down grovelling in the earth, working out thy sordid soul, it has nets that will ensnare thee there. If high up in the heavens of worldly prosperity and haughty ambition, proudly exulting in superiority, it has shots that will reach thee and bring thee down to the dust [*The Homilist*].

Man's Weal and Woe.—*Verse* 13.

There are but two conditions in which men are found, near to or distant from God. There can be no neutrality in religion. We must either be for or against God. If to depart from God be woe; to be intimate with him, to know and love him, must be man's weal, moral health, wholeness, and happiness. Hence—

I. God is the chief good of men. "Who will show us any good?" is the cry of the "many" in disappointment or unbelief. Man wants good: hates evil as evil, because it brings woe, suffering, and death. He wishes to find that supreme good which he craves for, which alone will satisfy his heart. This is not found in the creature, in the pleasures of sense and sin. God alone can satisfy the soul. He is the chief, the only good of men. But the *summum bonum*, the well-being of man, is not mere happiness, it is right character, the perfection and harmony of being. Happiness and joy are secondary and incidental to this. The only blessedness is the blessedness of the godly. We have not found this until restored and reconciled to God. To seek the chief good of man without God, without conformity to his will, is to subvert supreme reason, break down the eternal laws of the universe, and seek the impossible. "Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the *whole* of man"—not his duty merely (*duty* is interpolated), but his health and happiness—the sum of all that God requires—the end and perfection of his being. **II. Departure from God brings misery upon men.** "Woe unto them, for they have fled from me." 1. *Forsaking God involves misery.* "*Woe* unto them." Those who sin against God wrong their own soul (Prov. viii. 32); rob it of happiness and vigour, and are tempted to soul-murder. They forsake their own mercy (Jon. ii. 8); the God of my mercy (Ps. lix. 17), the personal knowledge of whom is the condition of happiness. Estrangement from God involves misery and deep distress (Jer. ii. 13; xvii. 13). Therefore the laws of God are (*a*) the expression of benevolent design, (*b*) in harmony with our moral constitution, and (*c*) should be constantly obeyed. 2. *Forsaking God involves destruction.* "Destruction unto them, because they have transgressed against me." God is not only the happiness, but the protection of the soul. "Salvation is of the Lord," and those who forget or forsake him bring present woe and future destruction upon themselves. God has connected our safety with the keeping of his law. Obey and we shall be saved; but disobedience to all laws, physical and moral, will result in pain and death. Sinners die because they will die: put from them that which will be their life, and love that which will be their death. "They that hate me love death."

God's Ways and Man's Ways.

I. God's ways towards man. God's ways to train the believer and save the sinner are manifold and wonderful. There are three specially indicated in the text. 1. We have *love*. The prophet speaks not mechanically. The man's soul is touched, and we see the sympathy of God in his pleadings and expostulations. With melting overtures he pours out the tenderest feelings of Divine love. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" &c. It is not a love cold and indifferent to the sins and sorrows of men. Some men with a selfish stoical heart behold the misery around them without the slightest feeling. Some are annoyed, and others endeavour to shun it. But few are pained at the sight, try to bear or remove it. God's love is wounded with the sins of his people, bursts forth into deep emotion. His "soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." Like a father's pity and a mother's tender care, this love is heard in the cry, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." 2. We have *law*. "They have transgressed." Sin is the transgression of the law, "for where no law is there can be no transgression." Law is found in all departments of the universe; is essential to order and good government. God has expressed his love in law, and entered into human history with authority and redeeming grace. Love is the natural, the parental feeling of God. But positive law is required to direct and control the actions of men. "Thou shalt not" is a necessary part of education; a boundary line between right and wrong—an essential condition of a happy life. God has written the words on the shore of every sea, in the constitution of every moral being, and in the history of every nation. Passions must be curbed; order must be pre

served, lest confusion and death should spread in God's dominions. 3. We have *providence.* Love may exist in the heart and not be displayed in outward act. Providence is God's love in action, written in facts. Divine agency is displayed in human history, delivering men from sin. God had redeemed Israel from captivity and bondage. He made known to them what he promised to be and what he was by what he did. Thought and character are known best when expressed in deeds. A mother's love is not known simply by word; but when she cares for her child, walks with it, and delivers it in danger, then she gives life and meaning to her words. So God fulfils his promise, honours his law, and redeems his people. The name Redeemer should therefore be above every name, should quicken and inspire our hearts with love. In the death of Jesus we have love historical and supernatural; redemption and moral influence spreading themselves through all time and reaching to all people. God's providence in Israel and God's love in Christ have become history and action in the past, energy in the present, and promise for the future. "He saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known." **II. Man's ways towards God.** Such treatment from God ought to excite gratitude and service. The truths of the Bible and the blessings of providence should not be entertained as mere external verities, but should become living and abiding sources of thought and feeling; motives to action and praise. The mercies we receive should be specially acknowledged. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Israel were guilty of three glaring sins. 1. *There was apostasy from God.* "For they have fled from me." God had made them a peculiar people, gave them a special covenant, and took them into intimate relationship with himself; but they forsook him, and were guilty of religious defection. It was not a partial, but a complete falling away. They turned from God in their hearts, and wandered from him in their ways. They *fled* in fear and anger, as if God was a cruel and inveterate enemy. God called unto them, but they refused to come: he sought to reclaim them, but they wandered further from him. The instinct of the bird teaches that its only place of safety and rest is the nest. Seldom does she return without injury or inconvenience to herself. So man, wandering from "the precincts," remains not under "the protection" of God. To leave his place and duties in society exposes him to temptation. He has no true rest, and only changes imaginary for real troubles. The discontented man, the unsteady professor, departing from God, wanders from his proper place and position. Man is a fugitive, wandering from his home, broken away from the law of holy and blessed allegiance. Sin has separated him from God. *Where art thou?* was the significant question put to rouse our first parent to a sense of guilt. Like a kind father, God calls now to men, holds out his arms of love to embrace them in return. "But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." 2. *There was rebellion against God.* It was no ordinary crime of which they were guilty. To apostasy they added open rebellion. "They have transgressed." Once depart from God, the way is open for all sins and temptations. When Israel had fled from God, they sinned wilfully and presumptuously, with a high hand and a stiff neck. They broke the law and thwarted the design of Divine love. Many now have no determination, no decision for God: changeful as the waves and fickle as the winds. Their heart is not right, neither are they stedfast in his covenant. They detract from the authority of God, and continually break the bonds of law; they set up self and refuse to yield to God; and, like a refractory horse and untamed bullock, constantly reject the bridle and draw back. "A stubborn and rebellious generation." 3. *There was contradiction to God.* "They have spoken lies against me." Oft as he redeemed them so often did they traduce him. Their whole life was a contradiction to his will, character, and conduct. They spoke lies in their lips and profession, added insult to ingratitude. They belied his prophets, and set up false gods in opposition to the true. They denied the pro

vidence and power of God, robbed him of the glory of their deliverance, and ascribed all their blessings to idols. "Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues." Thus Israel treated God for his kindness, and provoked him to anger by their sins. Well might God say, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Spoken lies. 1. Men lie in *thought.* When they have hard or slight thoughts of God—when they think that prosperity is given by idols, is gained by their own skill. 2. Men lie in *word.* When they declare that God does not see them and will not punish their sin. 3. Men lie in *worship.* When they represent God in graven images, offer prayers which do not come from the heart, and defraud God of his due. 4. Men lie in *conduct.* When they profess one thing and are really another — when they substitute error for truth, and deny the Holy One.

Sin is emphatically a *lie.* The sinner is antagonistic to God and his ways, a contradiction to God in his character and condition. In his whole conduct and career he has "*belied the Lord.*" Yet this lying to God is—1. A common sin. 2. A hateful sin. 3. A dangerous sin.

The visible Church doth lie against God, having been delivered of him, either when she denieth him in her practice (Tit. i. 16; Ps. xiv. 1); or when being delivered she doth belie her those professions and promises she made in trouble; or, when she cleaves still to false doctrine or corrupt religion, pretending it to be the truth, and constructs of God's delivering her, as if it were a testimony that he favoured her way; or when in her prosperity she forgets God, ascribing all her deliverances to her idols, as all her afflictions to him, as chap. ii. 5; Jer. xliv. 17, 18 [*Hutcheson*].

HOMILETICS.

The Howling of Distress.—*Verse* 14.

If a sinner will not take warning, but madly rush on, he must take the consequence of his folly. But when sorrow and punishment come upon him, he frets and cries to God in distress. When Israel suffered, they wept for their sins. God reproves them; they should have turned to him before. It is often too late to repent when the deed is done.

I. Men are often in great distress. Suffering of some kind we cannot avoid; it is incident to our mortal state. The ills that flesh is heir to are many. But sin brings suffering; neglect of Divine warnings brings Divine chastisement. 1. *Men often lack the necessities of life.* "Corn and wine" are not always given, often in justice withheld, and then famine results. The Irish famine through failure of potatoes created great distress. The luxuries and the necessities are taken away to humble our pride, punish our sin, and teach us dependence upon God. "The Lord gave" is the language of Scripture; that of atheism and pride, "My own hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. viii. 17). Heathens even acknowledged God as "the Giver of good things." He has the right to withdraw at his pleasure. God's hand must be seen in losses as well as gains. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." 2. *Men are often put on beds of affliction.* "They howled upon their beds." Active energetic persons are confined to their habitations, thrown helpless on their beds, and led to cry for mercy. Many have wearisome nights and days; bitter pains and sorrows; then they cry for mercy in sickness, which they despised in health. Their punishment is greater than they can bear. A sick bed is a place of trial and a school of discipline. **II. Men cry to God in great distress.** In prosperity and freedom they are right enough. Even beasts do not utter their cry when they have food. But how natural to feel and complain under

severe suffering! It is not palatable to reap the reward of our own doings. Hence—1. Men *cry*, but it is not the cry of penitence. It is the howling of anguish; the cry of despair; mere noise without spiritual feeling. 2. They cry to *God*. Like the atheist on the Ægean Sea, they may forget or ridicule the idea of God in calm and sunshine. When the storms come they change their creed and cry to their God. Men may live without God, but they never want to suffer or die without him. "Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble." 3. Their cry is *insincere*. (*a*) It is not from the *heart*. "They have not cried unto me with their heart." Their tears were wrung from them on account of distress and not sin. Their hearts were not set on God, and they could not pray unto him. The howling of the ancient heathen or the modern Indian is not true devotion. The prayer from a sense of pain and want is not the prayer of "a broken and contrite spirit," which is acceptable to God.

> Pleads he in earnest? look upon his face:
> His eyes do drop no tears, his prayers are in jest;
> His words come from his mouth, ours from our breast:
> He prays but faintly, and would be denied:
> We pray with heart and soul, and all beside.

(*b*) Their cry is *public clamour*. "They assemble themselves," gather tumultuously together, to join in stormy debate or clamour to their gods. They thought more of corn and wine than pardon of sin and peace with God. Men are more anxious for the body than the soul, and when deprived of the blessings of this life fret and murmur against God. 4. Their cry ended in *rebellion*. "They rebel against me," turn away from God, and then turn round to insult him to his face. This proved the insincerity of their prayer. Sanctified afflictions improve and wean from the world; unsanctified afflictions harden and lead to ungodliness. The iron when heated by the fire is soft and flexible, but afterwards goes hard and cold. When God slays men, then they seek him, return and inquire early after him. When restored they forget their vows and prayers, and live in estrangement from him. "For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works" (Ps. lxxviii. 32, 34).

The Ungrateful Return.—*Verses* 15, 16.

God tried all ways with his people, but of no use. He chastised them in judgment and remembered mercy. He gave them into the hands of enemies; they cried in distress, and he delivered them. Whatever God did, they were still the same. Four words sum up the varied methods of God to restore them; the one result was shameful abuse ending in fresh rebellion.

I. God's kindness to man. "I have bound and strengthened their arms." In whatever sense we take the words, the fact of ingratitude remains. 1. *God chastised them.* Time after time were they afflicted, but God withdraws his displeasure. Men see the greatness of Divine compassion, but never feel all the power of Divine anger. "He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath." 2. *God taught them.* Taught them to walk by their arms, as parents teach their children (ch. xi. 3; Deut. i. 31); taught them to war (Ps. xviii. 34); gave them victory over enemies (2 Kings xiv. 25, 26); "girded them with strength for battle." To him they owed all their military skill, strength, and success. All warlike prowess is the gift of God. The Lord is mighty in battle, and "the Holy Spirit is the great Drill-Master of heavenly soldiers." God taught and instructed Israel by his prophets and providence, by his word and worship, and by a peculiar mode of discipline trained them up for his service and honour. 3. *God strengthened them.* Weak within and wounded without, like a kind physician he bound up their wounds and healed their sores. He strengthened their arms and relieved them in sickness. God often restores individuals and reinstates nations in prosperity and health, but what thanks has he? "O Israel, thou hast de-

stroyed thyself, but in me is thine help." **II. Man's ingratitude to God.** Men like Hezekiah render not again according to the benefit done unto them (2 Chr. xxxii. 25). God intends to do them good, but they hate and forsake him. 1. *In wicked thoughts.* "Yet do they imagine mischief against me." Right thoughts of God are essential to right conduct. If we think evil in our hearts, evil will be manifest in our lives. "The *thought* of foolishness is sin." Men think lightly of the responsibility of thought, and declare that thoughts can hurt no one. As the thought is the fountain of the act, God counts it as the act, and holds us responsible for it. Bunyan, unlike many professors, was deeply troubled in remembrance of one sinful thought. Yet how men devise wickedness in their hearts! One meditates on objects of lust and avarice; another on schemes of ambition. Some think in envy, and others in malice and revenge "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?" 2. *In evil conduct.* "They return, but not to the Most High." The health restored and the life preserved from death should be given to God. God's kindness should beget loving thoughts and constant gratitude to him. But the conversion of many is feigned and hypocritical; a turning point in life, but not return to God in acknowledgment of his majesty, and dependence upon his word. Man changes from one thing to another: turns "from the sins of youth to the sins of age, from the sins of prosperity to the sins of adversity; but he himself remains unchanged," says a writer. True turning is *upwards*, in recognition of God's presence and holiness. The sinner looks forward and round, but forgets God in thought and conduct. The prodigal must come home. The penitent must return not half way, but entirely up to God. To forsake some sins and indulge in others, to denounce earthly things without devoting ourselves entirely to God, is not genuine conversion nor guarantee of amendment. "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto me." 3. *In blasphemous language.* "For the rage of their tongue." The princes were enraged themselves, and gave vent to their anger against God and his providence to others. The tongue, that unruly member, uttered lies and blasphemy. The nearer destruction approached the more madly princes and politicians contradicted the prediction. "Their tongue is as an arrow shot out; it speaketh deceit." Thus did Israel and thus do men treat the kindness of God. In evil thought, rebellious conduct, and abusive language do they manifest ingratitude. Mark the fearful gradations of their sin. (*a*) Surrounded by mercies, they design mischief. (*b*) Invited to return, they turn further away from God. (*c*) Then insults were added to ingratitude and rebellion. (*d*) Finally their language and conduct drew down God's anger upon them, and were the instruments of their own destruction. To render good for evil is God-like, but to render evil for good is devilish. What should *we* do with an undutiful, rebellious child nourished up in tender care? Could any virtue atone for this unnatural conduct? Yet God complains. "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." Rewarding evil for good is condemned by the heathen, hateful to God, and will bring destruction to the sinner himself and his house. "Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 15. *Mischief.* Sin is essentially mischief; mischievous in its designs and consequences—to God and man. In one sense man can do no hurt to God, but so bold is he in his sins that he tries, by robbing God of his glory and abusing his gifts. "Man would dethrone God if he could" [*Pusey*].

Subject. Divine dispensations abused. *I. God's dispensations with men are characterized by variety. II. That whatever the character of the Divine dispensations they are often perverted.* Observe—First, The force of the human will. Secondly, The depravity of the human heart [*The Homilist*].

Ver. 16. *A deceitful bow.* 1. *Misdirected in its aim.* Looked more to selfish and sinful things than things of God. 2. *Treacherous in its acting.* When bent, would suddenly start aside and recover its former position. Not to be depended upon. The bow of Jonathan "*turned not back*" (2 Sam. i. 22). 3. *Unfit for use.* Israel boasted of the bow, and sang the song of the bow, and a deceitful bow is made a type of their own unstedfastness and degenerate condition. God can turn man's glory into shame, and cast them away as unfit for his purpose in the earth. "They were turned aside like a deceitful bow" (Ps. lxxviii. 57).

Men's shortcoming, in the matter of repentance and conversion to God, showeth from their want of straightness in not *intending* what they pretend to, which is also a great sin: therefore it is added they are like a deceitful bow, that is, as a bow which hath a throw in it does never direct the arrow to the mark, however it seem to aim at it; so, however they pretend true repentance, yet they do not intend it, but only to deceive and flatter God till they might get out of trouble [*Hutcheson*].

Return. True repentance consists—1. In decided turning away from evil. Not half turning, nor halting short of God. 2 In decided turning to God. Positive devotion to God, so that he only is served and worshipped. It is not outward reformation, but inward renewal.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1. If we had eyes like those of God, we should think very differently of ourselves. The transgressions which we see and confess are but like the farmer's small sample which he brings to market, when he has left his granary full at home. We have but a few sins which we can observe and detect, compared with those which are hidden from ourselves and unseen by our fellow-creatures [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 2. *Habits.* As impossible as it is for a blackamoor to cast away his skin and to become white, and for a leopard to put away his spots; so impossible is it for them that ensnare themselves, and accustom themselves with evil doing, to change their custom and do well [*Cawdry*].

Ver. 4—7. *Fire.* Some few years ago a noble steamer moored in one of the harbours of the United States was discovered to be on fire. The engines were instantly started, and the prow of the vessel directed to the shore. But the flames soon rendered the helm useless, and such of the crew as were on board were obliged to jump into the small boat, and leave the steamer to her fate. Soon the engines worked more fiercely; the wheels revolved with fearful speed and hurried the vessel through the water. The sight was terrible. At last came one tremendous shock, and all was darkness and ruin. Such is man, when seized and heated by an evil passion, whether the spirit of pride or of envy. He grows worse and worse, and is consumed in eternal ruin, unless God interpose.

Ver. 5. *Feasting.* Times of festivity require a double guard. "Blasphemy is wit, and ribaldry eloquence, to a man that is turned into a brute" [*Lawson*].

Ver. 8. *The World* and *The Church.* Companions may be compared to the river Thames, which is a sweet and pretty river enough near its source; but in the great metropolis it has kept company with drains and sewers, under the belief that its current was too powerful and pure to be injured by them. It was meant that the river should purify the sewer, but, instead of that, the sewer has corrupted the river [*Union Magazine*].

Ver. 10. *Pride* is observed to defeat its own ends, by bringing the man who seeks esteem and reverence into contempt [*Bolingbroke*].

> "Pride hath no other glass
> To show itself, but *pride;* for supple knees
> Feed arrogance, and are the proud man's fees."
> *Shakspeare.*

Ver. 12. *Retribution.* As some eagle pierced with a shaft feathered from

its own wing, so many a sufferer, even in this present time, sees and cannot deny that it was his own sin that fledged the arrow of God's judgment, which has pierced him and brought him down [*Trench*].

Ver. 13. *Woe.* The iniquity of a bad man will itself be his ruin. Those wicked devices by which he designed and expected to secure himself becoming the instruments of his destruction. The essence of all wickedness is forsaking God.

Ver. 14. *Cried.* Many have been greatly afflicted and cried to God; been humbled, yet not made humble; humbled by force in their outward condition, but not humbled in their inward temper. "But when the sickness has passed away, the sweetness of the forbidden fruit again comes to mind; and as the dog returneth to his vomit,"—to the food which had caused his sickness,—"so a fool returneth to his folly" [*Bridge*].

Ver. 15, 16. *Ingratitude.* At the battle of the Alma, in September, 1854, a wounded Russian was piteously calling for water. Captain Eddington, whose heart was kind and charitable, ran up to him, and stooping, gave him the much-desired beverage. The wounded man revived. The Captain ran forward to join his regiment, when the wretch who had just been restored by his kindness fired and shot him who had been his friend in time of need. So many seek to injure God by returning him evil for good [*Biblical Treasury*].

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1.**] Abruptness indicating sudden judgment. **Eagle**] Swift and alarming (Deut. xxviii. 49). **He**] Shalmanezer, king of Assyria. **House**] Not the temple, nor land, but Israel viewed as the residence of God and one family (Num. xii. 7; Jer. xii. 7). **2. We**] Heb. joins Israel with the last clause, "*We know thee, we Israel,*" a plea of descent to move God to mercy; but hypocrisy, the cry of fear and not love. Dead knowledge cannot deliver. **3. Cast off**] implies dislike, the breaking of relative bonds. **Good**] (*tob*) may include God, the supremely good, and all the blessings of salvation. **Pursue**] in retribution for rejecting God. **4. Kings**] The self-authorized schism from the house of David. All their princes not from God. Many and violent were the usurpations and dethronements. **Knew**] Approved (Ps. i. 6; Matt. xxv. 12). **Idols**] and calf-worship a further sin. **They**] *i. e.* the gold and silver, as verse 6 [*Keil*]. Lit. that he may be cut off. The whole people destroyed [*Pusey*]. Though forewarned, yet heedless (Jer. vii. 15; xliv. 8). **5. Cast off**] disgusts. Israel had cast off God; calf-worship would cast off them or be the means of God casting them off. **How long**] Lit. how long will they not be able innocency to endure (cf. Is. i. 14; Ps. ci. 5); they were incapable of purity before God (Jer. xix. 4). **6. For**] The reason of displeasure. **It also**] The calf as well as the kings set up, made by Israel, not by God. It deserved not their homage, no creature can be God; idol worship therefore folly in the extreme. **7. Wind**] an image of labour in vain, from which ruin springs as naturally as harvest from evil sowing; as the wind becomes a tempest (Prov. xxii. 8; Gal. vi. 7). **Whirlwind**] Intensive form, a mighty whirlwind. Three things first—no stalk, no yield, devoured by strangers. Israel's efforts in every direction were fruitless. **8. Swallowed**] up as devoured by beasts of prey. **Vessel**] worthless and dishonoured (2 Tim. ii. 20); and broken (Ps. xxxi. 12; Jer. xxii. 28; xlviii. 38). **9. Assy-**] to gain friendship and alliance. **Wild ass**] A comparison which shows their folly, not as a paramour burning in lust, but heady, obstinate, and undisciplined; outstripping the swiftest horse in pursuit of lust, hunger, and thirst. "Whilst even a wild ass, that stupid animal, keeps by itself, to maintain its independence, Ephraim tries to form unnatural alliances with the nations of the world, that is to say, alliances that are quite incompatible with its vocation" [*Keil*]. **10. Hired**] by presents. **Gather**] them among the nations. **Now**] They shall not go as suppliants, but captives; the nations will oppress and not help them (Ezek. xvi. 37). **Sorrow**] (not, as margin, *begin*). **A little**] The greater judgment, the deportation, suspended. **Burden**] Tribute imposed on Israel (2 Kings xv. 19, 20). **11. Many**] Israel should only have one altar (Deut. xii. 3, 5). **To sin**] Altars made by them should be the source of their punishment; they shall go where there is nothing but altars. **12. Written**] Lit. I write. Israel could not plead ignorance; no excuse for men now, with the written word. **Great**] Deut. iv. 6, 8. *Wondrous* things (Ps. cxix. 18; cxlvii. 19, 20), a great many things, expressing the care and condescension of God and the comprehensiveness of his word. All the greater is that guilt which regards these commands as strange, no concern of theirs, though specially for them. **13. Sacrifices**] multiplied with the altars. Slain-

offerings were presented for gifts. Offerings which should be burnt for me they slay and devour. They profaned the sacrifice, and were concerned only about the flesh. **Rem-]** Sins for which sacrifices were thought to atone. **To Eg-]** A type of renewed bondage, like that from which they were delivered; abandonment to abject condition (Deut. xxviii. 68). **14. Forgotten]** Deut. xxxii. 18. Israel reared idol temples: Judah increased fortified cities; the sin of both, forgetfulness of God and deification of self as displayed in their buildings. God would destroy all these castles of security (Jer. xvii. 27; Amos ii. 5). Nothing can protect in judgment but the refuge, the hiding-place which he has provided.

HOMILETICS.

A Corrupt Church.—*Verse* 1.

Judgment is again threatened upon Israel for their sins. They were corrupt notwithstanding all profession to the contrary. They had forsaken God and cast off all good; they had changed the civil government, and maintained the golden calf, and were bringing upon them destruction swift and sure. Taking the house of God as meaning the family of Israel, the professed people of God, we have a corrupt Church endangered and warned.

I. The sins of a corrupt Church. "They have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law." 1. *The covenant was broken.* In condescension God made a covenant with them, to which they consented, and for the keeping of which he promised them rewards. They transgressed not the mere command, but their own original contract; revolted from their allegiance; and in effect declared that they would no longer be God's chosen people. They acted foolishly and deceitfully. 2. *The law was transgressed.* Divine authority was disregarded. Their sins were malignant and defied the bounds of law. All sin is lawless. When men break their own, God's laws cannot bind them. Those who have no respect for human stipulations will have no regard for Divine covenants. Israel were the professed children of God, yet how grievously they sinned. "God help me, my own children have forsaken me," cried James II. He could bear the defection of a kingdom and the desertion of an army, but burst into tears and wept in agony at the disloyalty of his family. **II. The danger of a corrupt Church.** 1. *Its sins are great.* The sins of a people who profess much, the defections of a Church which belongs to God, are more aggravating than ordinary transgressions. Israel were guilty of apostasy from God and sins against their neighbour. The Church can have no pretence of ignorance, nothing to excuse or extenuate her sins. She has the *covenant*, the law, and the gospel. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin; woe unto thee, Bethsaida," &c. 2. *Its danger is imminent.* "He shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord." Their fair titles and exalted privileges will not keep off the stroke. Enemies are ever prepared to execute judgments. The eagles gather where the carcass is found. The destruction is—(*a*) near, (*b*) swift, (*c*) certain, and (*d*) violent. Swift as an eagle swooping on its prey does retribution come upon false professors and conventional churches (Deut. xxviii. 49; Is. v. 26). **III. The warning of a corrupt Church.** "Set the trumpet to thy mouth." So God bids Isaiah, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet." As the sound of a war-trumpet would startle a sleeping army, so God would have religious teachers to rouse a sleeping Church. They are "watchmen," and must warn of coming judgments. There must be no cowardly silence, when the house of God is imperilled by sin and destruction. Augustine prayed, "Lord, deliver me from other men's sins." David cried, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness." Men are asleep, and the danger is nigh. The trumpet must neither be silent nor give any uncertain sound. "Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head."

Vain Religion.—*Verse* 2.

Israel in the hour of need call upon God, plead their knowledge of him as covenant people, and depend upon help for the sake of their relations to him;

God denies this claim, and will reject all who honour him with their lips merely, when their hearts are far from him. Knowledge without practice is all in vain. God will not own those who only profess, who cry, "My God," and do not forsake iniquity.

I. The religion of natural descent. "*We Israel*," the seed of Jacob, who was called Israel. This was the boast of the Jews. "We be Abraham's seed." Natural relationship and noble birth avail nothing before God. Yet men boast of their ancestry and pious parents, and trust God will regard them on that account. God has a peerage of his own. The grace of God can create children of Abraham from stones of the wilderness: the outcasts and the heathen. "Whose son art thou" spiritually? The son of God, or the son of the Devil? "He is a Jew which is one inwardly." **II. The religion of formalism.** "My God, we know thee." Knowledge is a necessity, and may be acquired by all. The knowledge of God is within the reach of every one. There is no excuse for ignorance of God. But many profess and use the name of God who do not know him; orthodox in their creed, but sinful in their life. "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him." They cry, "Lord, Lord," in their devotions, but in their lives are sinful and iniquitous. The religion of many is mere profession and words; a matter of form and ceremony. We as a nation say, "My God," boast of our morality and knowledge, build temples to God and swear by his altar; but our conduct contradicts our profession. To know God's will and do it not involves greater punishment; to possess great advantages and not to use them brings greater responsibility at the judgment-day. "Many," presumptuously boasting of their profession and work, "will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" **III. The religion of merit.** The spirit of the text is a spirit of pride and superior merit. *We* are Israel and *we* know thee, and have therefore a claim to thy mercy. God answers the plea in verse 3. Israel indeed! then why cast off good, and sin against me! You have no plea to urge and no merit to secure my favour. It was a plea of hypocrisy and fear. There is a fearful tendency in men to cling to good works, and hope to merit Divine mercy through religious duties. They mention benevolent deeds, devotional forms, and social morality, in hope of procuring God's favour. The Papist repeats his prayers, counts his beads, and makes his stated confessions, and feels that he is at peace with his Maker. The Protestant paces the round of religious duties in self-righteousness and pride, and soothes his soul with the hope of heaven. Merit we have none. The most holy and devout only do their duty. There are no works of supererogation. Salvation is of grace, not by works, lest any man should boast.

Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,—
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.

FORSAKING GOOD AND PURSUING EVIL, THE SUREST WAY TO RUIN.—*Verses* 3—5.

These words declare the true position of Israel. They were only Israel in name, and not in reality. They had cast off God, and with him everything good. They set up their own kings and institutions, did not seek to please, and were therefore disowned of God. Like sinners now, they pursued ways, the ends of which were death, and were so infatuated in their folly, that they seemed to act with a view to be "cut off" and utterly rejected.

I. The abandonment of good. "Israel hath cast off the thing that is good." 1. *God, the chief good*, was cast off. He was forgotten in his law, resisted in his demands, and forsaken in his worship. A thing cast off indicates supreme contempt,

utter abhorrence. We neither think of it nor care for it. This casting off of God—(*a*) *Is most unreasonable.* It is to forget our highest interests and wound our own souls; to offend our best friend, and involve ourselves in the greatest misery. (*b*) *Is most ungrateful.* "Is not God thy father that hath made thee?" Should we, then, despise a father's love and reject our greatest benefactor? "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." 2. *All good was cast off.* It is good to draw near to God (Ps. lxxiii. 28), and is best for us to do so, and therefore perilous to forsake God. It is our honour, peace, safety, and riches to love and worship him. Those who are far from him, those who reject him, cast off all that is good. They despise good in this world and in that which is to come. How sad the condition when men say, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? Who is the Lord, that we should obey his voice?" **II. Evil pursued.** Forsaking God opens up the way to the pursuit of evil. Spiritual good is the only safeguard of the soul. Cast off this, and you open the way for the ravages of sin. Israel had committed two evils. 1. *They were guilty of civil apostasy.* In founding the kingdom by Jeroboam, and in successive rule, they had set up kings without Divine authority (1 Kings xi. 27—40). They rebelled against the royal house of David, encouraged successful conspiracies, and sought their own selfish ends. Men now in family affairs, national politics, and religious life, set up their own and consult not God's will. They do not acknowledge God in all their ways; they act without his license and approval. As they begin, so they continue. They made and removed princes, as the Roman armies did emperors of old. In the "vicissitudes of families" and nations we have the rise and the fall of the mighty; the misfortunes of all who live and rule without God. Self-will will ever bring self-destruction. But God, whose power we cannot resist, and whose wisdom we should not dispute, will accomplish his own will in the affairs of men. 2. *They were guilty of religious apostasy.* "Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols." 1. *This idolatry was encouraged by nobility.* The kings and princes whom they set up patronized their customs and pleased their minds. They were ambitious in their aims, thought themselves absolute and free in their rule, and sought to gratify their own lusts. 2. *This idolatry was supported by wealth.* The gold and silver which God gave were devoted to the making of the calves or the support of their worship. One sinful change brings another. Civil rebellion must be upheld by ecclesiastical defection. Usurp the throne of men, and the next step is to set up idols on the throne of God. Withhold talents and wealth from God, or be niggardly in maintaining the true, and you will be lavish in upholding a false religion and a selfish scheme. Men employ their wealth against God; are constantly setting up their own kings, casting off Jehovah, and ungratefully abusing the gifts of his providence and grace. **III. Certain ruin results.** The course men pursue will determine their fate. Fallen angels cast off allegiance to God, and were driven from him. Many devout men, once true worshippers of God, have fallen into sin and idolatry. The gods you make will govern your life, fashion your character, and determine your destiny. Forsake all good and cast off God, you imperil your soul. Such conduct is ruinous and most destructive, attracts God's vengeance, and brings down his wrath upon the sinner. If they forsake him he will turn his back upon them, and "woe unto them when I depart from them." "Woe" in trial and distress, "woe" in the hour of death, "woe" in the eternal world. "Woe unto the wicked, for it will be ill with them." 1. *This is the fulfilment of God's word.* God denounced a curse upon them if they forsook him (Deut. xxviii. 15, 25). 2. *This is the natural retribution of Divine providence.* All the idols of men—wealth, ambition, and beauty—will fail them in the hour of need. They will be "cast off" by the gods in whom they trusted. "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off." But "the Lord will not cast off his faithful people, neither will he forsake his inheritance."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 2. *Cry, My God.* Men are ready enough to cry to God in affliction, when they forget him in health. Trouble drives the stoutest sinners and the most corrupt Church to prayer. "But religion, which is the best armour, is the worst cloak; and will serve hypocrites as the disguise Ahab put on, and perished" [*Trapp*].

Ver. 3. *Casting off God.* *First*, the good God, who is good, original, universal, all-sufficient and satisfactory, proportionate and fitting to our soul. He both is good and doeth good (Ps. cxix. 68), and that both naturally, abundantly, freely, and constantly (Ps. lxxxvi. 5). Israel cast, or rather kicked him off, as the word signifieth. So do all gross hypocrites; they are rank atheists, practical atheists, though professed Christians. *Secondly*, they reject Christ as a Sovereign, though content to have him a Saviour. They will not submit to the laws of his kingdom, nor receive him in all his offices and efficacies. *Thirdly*, hypocrites reject the good Spirit of God, the fruit whereof is all godliness, righteousness, and truth (Eph. v. 9). When God striveth with them, by yielding to Satan's suggestions they grieve that Spirit, by grieving resist him, and by resisting quench him, and by quenching him oppose him maliciously and do despite unto him, and so cast themselves into the punishing hands of the living God (Heb. x. 29, 31). *Lastly*, they cast off the good word and true worship of God; those right judgments, true laws, good statutes and commandments (Neh. ix. 13); they put the promises far from them, and judge themselves unworthy of eternal life (Acts xiii. 46); they hate instruction, and cast God's words behind them (Ps. l. 17). In a word, "he hath left off to be wise, and to do good; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil" (Ps. xxxvi. 3, 4) [*Trapp*].

I. The thing cast off—"*Good*,"—God, Christian worship, the Scripture. Despising them, throwing them away as worthless, putting them out of sight as obnoxious. Many boasters of the law did this practically. In these days many cannot endure practical duty and responsibility, contemptuously treat and despise the law of God, as Moses indignantly dashed it on the ground. *II. The spirit indicated.* 1. Pride. 2. Contempt of Divine authority. 3. Indifference to Divine truth. 4. Atheism of heart. 5. Deadness of conscience and all moral feeling. *III. What this leads to.* Sooner or later it leads to (1) open transgression, and (2) outward rejection. If men cast away the thing that is good there is no wonder when evils pursue and overthrow them (Ps. cxl. 11; Prov. v. 14).

When men once begin to turn their back on their own happiness and on the way of God, they will still grow more averse from it, till they become to abominate and abhor it; and this fills up the measure of their iniquity. God will not let sin thrive in their hands, but will send on judgments, and let them feel their loss in their strokes who would not see their prejudice in forsaking what was good [*Hutcheson*].

Ver. 4. *Set up kings.* Such were all their kings except Jehu and his house. During 253 years, for which the kingdom of Israel lasted, eighteen kings reigned over it out of ten different families, and no family came to a close, save by a violent death. The like self-will and independence closed the existence of the Jewish people [*Pusey*].

In the government of nations and the choice of rulers, in family duties and in individual life, God should be consulted and pleased. For he can put down what we set up, and set up what we put down.

Ver. 5. *Cast thee off.* Rejected by one's own God, disappointed in one's own choice! If Samaria had been firm and faithful to the God of Israel it would have been of great service, a powerful help in need; but the calf was a broken reed, a miserable comforter. So this will ever be the case. Beauty and fame may fade like flowers. Riches take unto themselves wings and fly away.

Idols will be shivered to pieces, and the men who trusted on them disappointed for ever. All fail and nothing abides, save God, the only true and permanent good.

"O Cromwell, Cromwell,
Had I but served my God with half the zeal
I served my king, he would not in mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies."

HOMILETICS.

IDOLATRY; ITS ORIGIN, EFFECTS, AND DESTINY.—*Verses* 5, 6.

These words describe the cause and nature of Israel's sin, and justify God's anger against them.

I. Idolatry in its origin. Idols are the device of man. "The workman made it." Man in his natural and primeval condition had a knowledge of God sufficient for the condition in which he was placed. But sin alienated him from God and robbed him of fellowship with God. There is a natural tendency in man to embody in living forms (*eidola*) the image of God, to imagine and honour other gods. Dissatisfied with the law, and forgetful of the claims of the true God, he has wandered in the conjectures of reason and the creations of fancy; in the beasts of the field and the fish of the sea, in all the lights of heaven and in all the elements of nature, he beheld the movements of a false deity; and associated vague notions of power and wisdom with the realities by which he is surrounded. Hence the creation of gods many and lords many. They are things *made*, the work of men's hands. "They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not." They are not gods, but vanities, and have become a crime and a curse to heathendom. "They that make them are like unto them, so is every one that trusteth in them." But "from *Israel* was it also," who boasted of the knowledge and law of God. Israel knew her sin, and felt that calf-worship was not the worship of Jehovah. This rendered her inexcusable and aggravated her guilt. Now among people to whom the oracles of God are committed, even in the Christian Church, we have idolatry. Men cut and carve gods of their own fancy. The wife of their bosom, the child of their loins, may be a god. An image of gold or of clay;—business, fame, and success, may be set up, take the place of God in our affections, and unduly absorb homage and attention due to God. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." **II. Idolatry in its effects.** 1. *It is dishonouring to human nature.* Man assimilates himself to the moral character of the object which he worships, becomes like the thing which he loves. He looks upon his God as the standard of virtue; abandons everything in life which offends; and desires favour by conformity to the will and character of his deity. The history of idolatry confirms this truth. When men have bowed down to the brutes, they have lowered themselves in the depths of vice. The more they worshipped the more they resembled the objects of their worship. Medhurst says that in China the priests teach this doctrine of assimilation. "Think of Buddha and you will be transformed into Buddha. If men pray to Buddha and do not become Buddha, it is because the mouth prays, and not the mind." Our character and conduct can never rise higher than our aims. If we follow earthly objects we become earthly and grovelling. The pleasure-seeker becomes light and frivolous; the mammon-worshipper sordid and mean. "My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit." 2. *It is displeasing to God.* "Mine anger is kindled against them." God here speaks after the manner of men to remind us of his claims. As men who incensed will execute their displeasure, so God will punish idolatry. It forbids his worship and denies his existence. It is degrading to his creatures and calamitous to the universe. Its temporal consequences have been awful to its votaries. What then must be its eternal? "They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed." 3. *It is a hindrance to moral purity* "How long

will it be ere they attain to innocency?" God is the fountain of all goodness, and his will the standard of all virtue. When God's will is rejected there is no check to moral pollutions, and no motives to moral purity. The knowledge of God is essential to holiness and progress! inseparable from the welfare of men: and necessary to extricate a fallen world from the evils of idolatry. (1) Purity of heart is necessary to purity of life. This is only gained by the love and worship of a pure object. A sinful object defiles physically and spiritually. God is opposed to sin, revealed as our example, renews the heart, and satisfies the conscience in Christ. "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect." (2) Purity of the object worshipped must therefore have sufficient influence to beget holy life. The mere representation of God, the presentation of a holy object would not touch the heart, change the opinions, and draw men from evil practices. A display of power and persuasion alone can overcome evil habits, wean men's affections from idols, and fix them on God. God has interposed by his Son and his Spirit, and sinners are converted from the error of their ways. We have one true and living God made known to us as the object of supreme love and regard. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." **III. Idolatry in its destination.** "The calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces." In origin it is a thing of nought, the work of men's hands and ingenuity. In its end it shall be nought. Idolatry is a nullity, and is doomed to destruction by its inherent weakness and God's purpose. 1. *Idolatry is doomed to destruction by its own weakness.* With all its splendid rites and forms, its ancient priesthood and prevalence, it is coming to nought. It cannot satisfy the heart and the conscience. The heathens are closing their temples and pagodas, breaking their gods and forsaking their worship. Deserted by devotees, and their altars bereft of gifts and offerings, idols shall pine away and idol-worship perish by mere inanition. Idolatry in the old Roman Empire was thus destroyed, and this will be the process everywhere. Its seat is in the soul, and outward force cannot overturn it. But the gods of the heathen will be *starved to death*, by the failure of their revenue and offerings. "The Lord will be terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen." 2. *Idolatry is doomed to destruction by the power of the gospel.* God has purposed to send the gospel to all the nations of the earth. "As I live, saith the Lord, all the earth shall be filled with my glory." Nothing can frustrate this design nor rob the nations of this glory. What a conception! What is there in patriotism, philosophy, or philanthropy, to equal it? The mighty scheme, as a mere system of social government and social culture, stands forth in peerless grandeur. But how blessed that day when "a man shall cast his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats: to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 5. "*How long.*" The hardness of heart and the stubborn holding out of the sinner a matter of astonishment even to God. Continuance in sin and aggravation of guilt only make the case worse. God's patience will end, and God's anger will be the hotter. By this powerful expression three things are intimated. *First*, that these Israelites were refractory and desperate; not only unclean, but enemies to innocency, such as could not abide it: they were inveterate and incurable, their diseases ingrained, and not easily stirred by any potion. *Secondly*, that God is most patient, who though he thinks overlong of the time that men continue in sin, and therefore cries, How long? &c., yet bears with their evil manners and inviteth them to better. *Thirdly*, that he will at length break off his patience and proceed to punishment, since there

is no other remedy (2 Chron. xxxiv. 16; Prov. xxix. 1) [*Trapp*].

The attainment of innocency. I. The thing to be attained—"Innocency." Man was originally innocent in body and soul, created in the image of God. But this holiness he lost through sin and can never perfectly, only comparatively attain it in this world. Sinless perfection is a delusion (1 Jn. i. 8). II. The method of attaining it. "How shall man be just with God?" Our guilt is removed in Christ, our natures renewed by grace, and the Holy Spirit imparts Divine enlightenment and transforms into the Divine nature. Believers in Christ are justified before God. Their faith works by love, and overcomes sin and the world. All men may secure this privilege. III. The reason why men do not attain it. 1. Some despise and do not feel their need of it. 2. Others despond in seeking it. God is able and willing to save. Examples of men most degraded and abandoned encouraged. "How long," then, before you accept the proffered mercy and find peace with God!

Ver. 6. *Not God.* Such is the bewitching nature of idolatry, though men pretend that they worship God in the image, and the deceitfulness of the human heart; that they are gradually led to deify their idol. God therefore proves that *it is not God* (Ex. xxxii. 4, 5; 1 Kings xii. 28).

Whatever estimation men have of images, or whatever excellency or Divinity they conceive in or represented by them, yet it is sufficient to refute them, that themselves, who are but vain and empty things, gave all the excellency they have; for the *workman made it* [*Hutcheson*].

The workman was rather a god to his idol, than it to him; for *he* made it; *it* was a thing made. To say that it was made, was to deny that it was God. Hence the prophets so often urge this special proof of the vanity of idols. No creature can be God. Nor can there be anything between God and a creature; and that which is not a creature is God. God himself could not make a creature who should be God [*Pusey*].

Broken in pieces. Deifying any creature makes way for the destruction of it. If they had made vessels and ornaments for themselves of their silver and gold, they might have remained; but if they make gods of them, they shall be *broken to pieces* [*Mt. Henry*].

HOMILETICS.

A Picture of Ungodly Life.—*Verses* 7, 8.

Israel is still threatened. Their continual labour is all in vain. They reap no reward, will be grievously disappointed, and not only the harvest, but they themselves will be devoured. Such will be the result of their ungodly conduct.

I. Laborious in its efforts. "For they sow the wind." 1. Effort is put forth by all men. They live and labour for good—seek to gain happiness and have a seed-time in life. 2. Painful are the efforts of the ungodly. They "*plough* iniquity," and practice it day by day. "They *sow* the wind," most earnestly and perseveringly, in hope of profit. Sinners are sore labourers. They put themselves to trouble and expense to make and worship their idols, to pursue their aims, but all in vain. They are *labouring for the wind* (Ecc. v. 16); "embracing a shadow; grasping the air; wearying themselves for that which hath no substance nor true felicity in it." **II. Disappointment in its results.** "It hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal," &c. First no ear, or if an ear, no yield, or if it advance thus far, the enemy will devour the produce. 1. *Vanity is reaped.* He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity (Prov. xxii. 8). There is a harvest in sin, and men reap what they sow (Gal. vi. 7, 8). Vanity, emptiness, and vexation result from sin. Satan is a hard task-master. His service is slavery and the wages miserable. "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" 2. *Divine retribution is reaped.* "They shall reap the whirlwind." The wind sown and penned up in ungodly life, will be reinforced in

strength and burst forth into a mighty tempest. Men sow and cultivate what at last will make them the sport and mockery of its resistless violence. They will be carried away with their own folly like chaff before the wind. The whirlwind will overthrow their dwellings, wreck their hopes, and drive them away in their wickedness. Sennacherib in olden time reaped the whirlwind (Is. x. 5—12, 24, 25; xxx. 31). Napoleon, robbed of empire, shorn of greatness, and driven into exile, reaped the harvest of his own sowing. Spain with its Inquisition, and France with its Black Bartholomew, countries remarkable for persecution, reaped the whirlwind in bloody revolutions and civil wars. The ungodly are consumed by Divine judgments in this life and by Divine wrath in that which is to come. "They that plow iniquity and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed." **III. Destructive in its end.** "Israel is swallowed up." Not mere disappointment, but destruction will be the result of sin. Israel were carried away, the whole nation were swallowed up by foes. They lost their privileges and honour. Their land was devoured and eaten up by strangers. They were dishonoured by God, and despised by men as a broken vessel. Sin and idolatry in gross or refined forms will bring misery and degradation. They undermine the foundations of moral life, beget more place for vanity and more thirst for pleasure. Those who do not love and serve God will be given up by God. There will come, though long delayed, a terrible day of wrath, a harvest of whirlwinds to consume their glory and destroy their hopes. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 7. "*They have sown.*" 1. Human life a *sowing* time. "Behold a sower went forth to sow." The relation of men one to another like that of seed and soil. Men are sowing by thoughts, words, and deeds. In each a permanent influence, a germ of imperishable life. 2. The kind of life—moral *seed*. Some sow good seed, others worthless seed. The pleasure-seeker and the man of the world, the hypocrite and the false professor, are sowing "the wind." 3. The accompaniments of life—*the harvest*. The harvest is good or bad, the same in measure and quality as the sowing. Men reap to-day what they had sown yesterday, will reap in eternity what they sow in time. God's laws are unchangeable and will never be reversed. "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting."

Not only may men expect to reap as they sow, but sinful and vain courses will bring further disadvantages, and raise violent tempests, either in the undertaker's conscience, or outward condition, or both; for "*they have sown the wind, and shall reap the whirlwind*" [*Hutcheson*].

Ver. 8. Sinful courses persisted in may consume the Church, deprive of religious ordinances, and gratify the wishes of the enemy, who greedily devour God's people (Ps. xiv. 4).

When professors decline in religion and despise God, then God will despise them before others. So long as Israel was consecrated to the Lord those who sought to injure her were injured themselves (Jer. ii. 3); but when they made leagues with idolaters they were swallowed up by them. "For them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

Dishonoured vessels. 1. A *useless* vessel. Empty of everything good, filled with everything bad, and taking the place of vessels more useful and worthy. 2. A *broken* vessel. Broken in credit and reputations, broken to pieces in hopes and fortunes; broken by their own conduct and by the judgments of God upon that conduct. 3. A vessel *put to some vile purpose*. Israel given to idolatry. Men dishonouring

body and soul by sin, making them objects of loathing and disgust before others. "There are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth: and some to honour, and some to dishonour" (2 Tim. ii. 20). All men are vessels of mercy, or vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (Rom. ix. 22).

Such has been the history of the ten tribes ever since; *swallowed up*, not destroyed; among the nations, yet not of them; despised and mingled among them, yet not united with them; having an existence, yet among that large whole, *the nations*, in whom their natural existence has been at once preserved and lost; everywhere had in dishonour; the Heathen and the Mohammedan have alike despised, outraged, insulted them; avenging upon them, unconsciously, the dishonour which they did to God [*Pusey*].

HOMILETICS.

The Folly of Worldly Alliance.—*Verses* 9, 10.

A fourth sin is laid to the charge of Israel in seeking aid from Assyrians. This sin is reproved by two similitudes—a wild ass loving its freedom, and a harlot suing for paramours. It is folly to seek help in civil defection and religious apostasy.

I. The alliance is unnatural. 1. *It is against the habits of nature.* The wild ass, taken in its love for solitude, or its headstrong perversity in pursuing its lust, reproves this conduct. Israel was a holy people, separated from others for a special purpose, and intended to be the people of God. "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." God's people should never mix up with worldly men. Their name and their nature should separate them from sin. They stand upon a moral elevation; to trust to worldly alliance and hire foreign aid is to sacrifice their principles and degrade their nature; to acknowledge the superiority of the world, and sink themselves below their true position. The sympathies and aspirations of the new man are with God and not the world. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 2. *It reserves the customs of men.* "Ephraim hath hired lovers." The ordinary way is for lovers to hire her (Ezek. xvi. 33, 34). When Churches are deserted, and professors are forsaken by God, they often go further wrong than others, more bent on wickedness than ordinary transgressors. What folly to purchase the aid of an enemy! what value is that affection which can only be enlisted by gold and hire? The world should be taught to admire the Church as a wise and understanding people; but when they despise their own dignity, they pay dearly for the alliance of "the nations." "The contrary is in thee from other women, in thy whoredoms, whereas more followeth thee to commit whoredoms; and in that thou givest a reward, and no reward is given unto thee, therefore thou art contrary." **II. The alliance is unfaithful.** As a man should cleave to his wife, so Israel should cling to God. But how loathing and immodest to forsake God, to whom we are bound by marriage covenant, and tempt and hire other lovers! Such was the baseness of Judah, and such the unfaithfulness of many now. When God likens the idolatry of his ancient people to adultery and harlotry, the Christian Church of the present age should take the warning and remain faithful to God. **III. The alliance is destructive.** "Yea, though they have hired among the nations, now will I gather them." The sin of Israel brought its own punishment. They sought to secure themselves by hired kings, sent presents to them and made leagues with them against God's will: but their policy deceived them. God would gather those very nations, not to help, but to destroy Israel. When nations rely on hired levies, and Churches have recourse to ungodly powers, to save from anticipated judgments, God in just retribution makes these very powers the instruments of

his purpose. Providing for their own glory and safety makes them easier prey to their enemies. There is no security but in God himself. "I will gather all thy lovers with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 9. *A wild ass* typical of the sinner. 1. *In its disregard for its owner.* "Neither regardeth he the crying of the driver" (Job xxxix. 8). 2. *In its obstinate course.* It is most unruly and stubborn, intense in its thirst and swift in its pursuit. Self-will, frowardness, and intractableness the complaints against Israel. Men now throw off God's yoke, seek to be free and uncontrolled, to pursue their folly without restraint. "The heart of man is fully set in them to do evil." 3. *In its constant danger.* "The wild ass is the lion's prey in the wilderness" (Eccles. xiii. 19). Men who rush from God are exposed to danger from themselves and others in time and in eternity. Apart from grace, man after his hard and impenitent heart treasures up wrath against the day of wrath" (Rom. ii. 5).

Ver. 10. *Sin and sorrow.* "Now will I gather them," &c. 1. The *beginning* of sin is the beginning of sorrow. Men do not believe this. It may be contrary to their experience and observation, but the fact is declared in God's word, and written in our moral nature and constitution. *Now* "they shall sorrow a little." 2. The *end* of sin will be the greatest sorrow. Israel sorrowed "*a little*" under the bondage and heavy taxes of Assyria, but their future punishment was the greater calamity. Now sorrow is a little, a drop before the storm, hereafter it will be a tempest. God suspends the greatest judgments to prove his compassion for men, give time for repentance, and opportunity to return to him. Here only we have "*the beginning of sorrows;*" what then will be the end "of them that obey not the gospel of God?"

HOMILETICS.

Aggravated Guilt.—*Verses* 11—13.

"The prophet had first shown them their folly in forsaking God for the help of man; now he shows them the folly of attempting to secure themselves by their great show, pretences of religion, and devotion in a false way. God had appointed *one* altar at Jerusalem. There he willed the sacrifice to be offered, which he would accept. To multiply altars, much more to set up altars against the one altar, was to multiply sin. Hosea charges Israel elsewhere with this multiplying of altars as a grievous sin (x. 1; xii. 11)."

I. **In multiplying altars.** "Ephraim hath made many altars." Opposing the commandment of God (Deut. xii. 5), strengthening the habit of sin (1 Kings xii. 30), repeating their own folly, and increasing their own punishment. "Altars shall be unto him to sin." II. **In despising the law.** God had given the law, written and expounded it by Moses and the prophets, and continually renewed the knowledge of it, so that they had no excuse for their sin. God has written the law for us by his providence and gospel. His agency is ever fulfilling it; yet men deny it, count it a strange thing, a word with which they have nothing to do. The excuses which men make for rejecting it are not pleas, but sins in the sight of God. III. **In offering lifeless sacrifices.** "They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings." 1. *It was mere external worship.* It was mere *flesh*, not a true sacrifice. External worship without internal ceremony, without sanctity, is like a dead carcase, not a living sacrifice. The Lord accepts it not. 2. *It was mere selfish worship,*—"and eat it." Sacrifices which should have been burnt

for God they slaughtered and devoured. They were concerned only about temporal affairs. We cannot atone for contempt of God by forms of our own. "Dissembled holiness is double iniquity." There is only one sacrifice for sin; if that be rejected, sins will be remembered and punished. The devices of selfishness and will-worship can never avert, will only hasten, the penal consequences of sin. "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination, how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?"

PERVERSION OF WORSHIP.—*Verses* 11, 12.

The passage leads us to notice *the perversion of worship.* This is one of the oldest, the most prevalent and the most hateful sins amongst mankind. Men have perverted worship, not only by making false gods, but by making false altars for the true God. There is only one altar in true worship, and that altar is Christ (Heb. xiii. 10). Two remarks in relation to false worship. I. It is a *great* sin. First, It is a very *propagative* sin. "Ephraim hath made many altars." "If men leave the rule," says an old author, "they know not where to stay, hence the multiplying of things thus amongst the Papists, five hundred altars in some one temple." How sublimely antagonistic the Jews were to the introduction of any altar but one (Jos. xxii. 11), but now they had "many." Once admit a wrong thing in worship, and that one thing will multiply itself; superstition will give it fertility. The Romish Church is a sad illustration of this, and the Anglican Church in some sections is multiplying examples. Secondly, It is a *self-punishing* sin. "Altars shall be unto him to sin." The idea probably is, "As you have gone on persisting to multiply altars against my will, I will let you alone, you shall go on, your altars shall be a sin unto you." "That is, thus seeing they will have them, they shall have them; they shall have enough of them. They refuse to see the light, they are prejudiced against the way of God's worship; let them have their desires; let them have governors to establish by their authority, and teachers to defend by subtle arguments what they wish for; they multiply altars to sin, and they shall be to sin, even to harden them. This is the judgment of God, to give men their heart's desire in what is evil. And as it shall be to them for sin, so it shall be to them for misery, the fruit of sin." II. It is a sin against *great light.* "I have written to him the great things of my law," &c. They could not say they sinned in ignorance; God gave them directions most concise and abundant concerning the nature and object of true worship. Some translate the words—"I may prescribe my laws to them by myriads, they will treat it as a strange thing." First, *God has given us laws* concerning worship. Secondly, Those laws are *oft-repeated.* By myriads or by thousands. We have "line upon line," and "precept upon precept." Thirdly, These oft-repeated laws leave *false worshippers without excuse* [*The Homilist*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 13. *Many altars.* Altars to God, altars to man, altars to pleasure, &c. Sin its own punishment. It has *fruit,* and the fruit shall not only be gathered, but eaten. Men constantly live in the fruit of their own doings (Prov. i. 31). Many altars, many sins, and many punishments. "As men are most fearfully plagued when they go on in sin and perish, so when they do not stand in awe of the sin of their course, it is righteous of God to make them feel how ill sin is and how displeased he is with it; for the words import that they shall be given up to that sin; and as they sinned and cared not, so the Lord would make it to be seen to be sin indeed, and make them feel how sad that is" [*Hutcheson*].

Ver. 12. Scripture slighted. I. *Divine in their origin.* God the author—"I have written." "Given by inspiration of God"—the grandest and sublimest origin from whence anything can come.

Then regard its authority, love its truthfulness, and obey its precepts. *II. Excellent in its nature*—"the great things of my law." The word gives the idea of things heaped together, then greatness and increase from the overflow. Hence the contents of Scripture—1. Are *great*, containing the great things of God (Acts ii. 11). 2. *Wonderful* (Ps. cxix. 18; Deut. iv. 6, 8). 3. *Varied*, or manifold (Eph. iii. 10). *III. Specific in its form.* "I have *written*." Nature and philosophy teach us to record our laws and hand them down to future generations in a permanent form. A written revelation is necessary for all ages, and has manifold advantages above an oral one. God uttered his word at first, writes it afresh in the wonders of his providence, the work of his Spirit, and the preaching of the gospel. The Bible is a revelation of God's will, full and free, adapted to our wants and circumstances, and worthy of all acceptation. *IV. Despised in its mission.* Accounted, reckoned as or like a strange thing; as if an alien, or something with which men have no concern. 1. *Some* reject it as a revelation from God. 2. Others disregard it as a standard of duty. 3. By all it is neglected and unread. It is a book unknown, misunderstood, and despised. Men excuse themselves; consider the Scripture unreasonable in its demands, an enemy to liberty, progress, and science. But given by inspiration of God, profitable for doctrine and correction (2 Tim. iii. 16), the Bible can never be set aside as useless and effete. God writes to warn us of this danger and deprive us of excuse.

Ver. 13. Many engage only in the external duties of religion. Disregarding God's rule, they fix up their own, and obey that no further than personal ends uphold them. All is not given to God; they must eat part and share with him. God will have all or none. The sacrifice must be *burnt*, and self devoted entirely to him.

God does not connive at sin—will *remember* and *visit* it with judgments here and punishment hereafter. "God seems to man to forget his sins, when he forbears to punish them; to *remember* them, when he punishes."

HOMILETICS.

Castles of False Security.—*Verse* 14.

The sin of Judah and Israel is here traced to one cause—forgetfulness of God. Though he made and established them as a nation, their self-confidence and idolatry led them to forsake and offend God, to build temples and palaces, which he destroyed by fire.

I. Men build temples in forgetfulness of God. "Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples." There was only one temple, to build more was to disobey God. Yet they build in professed recognition of God, act religiously, but sin wilfully. Giving land, building churches and benevolent institutions, not always a proof of religious prosperity. 1. *Temples are built in superstition.* Like the monasteries of the middle ages, for the remission of sins, the redemption of souls, and the honour of saints. 2. *Temples are built in spite.* Men have grievances, secede from other places and build for themselves. 3. *Temples are built in the interests of sectarianism.* All sects rival each other in this respect, and seek to cover the land with their churches and chapels. Temples built in forgetfulness of God, to commemorate man, are not required at our hands. "Ye have not looked unto the Maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago." **II. Men increase national defences in forgetfulness of God.** "Judah hath multiplied defenced cities." Nebuchadnezzar erected Babylon in self-confidence and pride. Samaria and Jerusalem were strongly fortified, but destroyed at last. The strength of a nation depend not upon the skill of its parliament and the splendour of its fleets; nor the valour of its soldiers and the number of its fortifications. God alone is our defence; for he can "impoverish the

fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst." Men who found empires and build cities in opposition to him can never succeed. The Roman Empire crumbled away by the weight of its greatness. The kingdoms of Alexander, Cæsar, and Napoleon came to nought. Babylon and Carthage, Macedon and Persia, Greece and Rome were built, prospered for a while, and then declined. The safety of a nation is in the moral conduct of its people and the guardianship of God. "Except the Lord *build* the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord *keep* the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 2. *Hope.* There are few men, even among the most worldly, who do not expect to be converted before they die; but it is a selfish, mean, sordid conversion they want—just to escape hell and to secure heaven. They desire just experience enough to make a key to turn the lock of the gate of the celestial city. They wish "a hope," just as men get a title to an estate. No matter whether they improve the property or not, if they have the title safe. A "hope" to them is like a passport, which one keeps quietly in his pocket till the time for the journey, and then produces it [*Beecher*].

Ver. 3, 4. *Casting off good.* When children get high notions and despise home, when they throw off parental authority and restraint, they become wayward and self-willed; make the path of life difficult, which their parents had pioneered and made easy. So one who casts off the fear of God and sets up his own, or the authority of others, insults his Maker and injures himself, makes his future miserable, and may be cast off himself at last.

Ver. 5, 6. *Idolatry.* Travellers tell us that there is a tribe in Africa so given to superstition that they fill their huts and hovels with so many idols, that they do not even leave room for their families. How many men there are who fill their hearts with the idols of sin, so that there is no room for the living God, or for any of his holy principles [*Bate*].

Man, that aspires to rule the very wind,
And make the sea confess his majesty;
Whose intellect can fill a little scroll
With words that are immortal; who can build
Cities, the mighty and the beautiful:
Yet man,—this glorious creature,—can debase
His spirit down to worship wood and stone,
And hold the very beasts which bear his yoke,
And tremble at his eye, for sacred things.
[*Landon.*]

Ver. 9. *Love*—

Our passions are seducers; but of all,
The strongest love. He first approaches us
In childish play, wantoning in our walks;
If heedlessly we wander after him,
As he will pick out all the dancing way,
We're lost, and hardly to return again.
[*Southey.*]

Ver. 10, 11. *Sin increased.* Sin is like a stone which is cast into water, and multiplies itself by infinite circles [*Basil*]. All sin and wickedness in man's spirit hath the central force and energy of hell in it, and is perpetually pressing down towards it as towards its own place. The devilish nature is always within the central attractions of hell, and its own weight instigates and accelerates its motion thither [*John Smith*].

Ver. 12. *Scripture.* I am of opinion that the Holy Scriptures contain more sublimity and beauty, more pure morality, more important history, and finer strains of poetry and eloquence, than can be collected from all other books in any age or language [*Sir W. Jones*]. There are many books which are good and sound, but, like half-pence, there goes a great quantity to a little amount. There are a few *silver* books, and a very few *golden* books; but I have one book worth more than all, called the *Bible*, and that is a book of bank-notes [*J. Newton*].

There is not a more evident testimony of a corrupt and depraved disposition than an irreverent treatment of sacred things, a contempt of anything that carries on it a Divine impression, or an obstinate neglect of any of those ordinances which the wisdom of God has appointed to support and preserve his religion in the world [*Bp Gibson*].

Ver. 13. *Sacrifice.* He was a man

who stole the livery of heaven to serve the devil in [*Pollock*].

Where the fear of God is, there is the keeping of his commands; and where the keeping of the commandments, there is the cleansing of the flesh; which flesh is a cloud before the soul's eye, and suffers it not purely to see the beam of heavenly light, and worship God upon such sacrifices.

The gods themselves throw incense.
[*Shakespeare.*]

Ver. 14. *Defence.* When Nicephorus Phocas had built a strong wall about his palace for his own security, in the night time, he heard a voice crying to him, "O Emperor! though thou build thy wall as high as the clouds, yet, if sin be within, it will overthrow it" [*Foster*].

CHAPTER IX.

Critical Notes.] **Israel had fallen away from God, would not enjoy the produce of the field, but would be taken captive into Assyria, and be unable to keep the feasts. 1. Rejoice**] Lit. to exultation (Job iii. 22). Their rejoicings are out of place; festivity and mirth are reproved. The blessings of harvest were attributed unto the gods of the heathen, and would be taken away. **Reward**] Lit. hire. In reward for idolatry thou hast desired temporal prosperity, corn on every threshing-floor. **2. Feed**] Crops were abundant, but they would be no better for their plenty. **3. Land**] which God sware to give their fathers (Deut. xxx. 20). **Egypt**] A state of bondage and oppression in Assyria. **Unclean**] A sore trial, seen in the case of Daniel (ch. i. 8). Eleazar and the Maccabees (2 Macc. vi. 7). They had wilfully transgressed the law, and would be forced to live in its habitual breach; had lived as heathen, and must be in the condition of heathen. **4. Wine**] *i.e.* drink-offerings, connected with burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, betokened joy in sacrifice. Hence public service would cease; they would no longer have the means for reconciliation, for *pleasing* God; and if they should attempt to sacrifice, so far from being acceptable, their sacrifices would defile them *as the bread of mourning;* food which contracted pollution by being in the place of death. The dead defiled for seven days the house and all that was in it (Num. xix. 14). In offering tithes a man had to declare that he had not touched the bread (Deut. xxvi. 14). Sacrifice could only be offered in God's land: in captivity it would be a fresh sin to Israel. **Their soul**] *i.e.* for themselves, for the support of animal life, and not for worship. **5. Solemn day**] God "singles out the great festivals which commemorated his great doings for his people as though they had no more share in these mercies." Sad to be deprived of ordinary sacrifice, how much more to be excluded from feasts of joy! **6. Gather them**] in one common grave—none shall escape. **Memphis**] called Noph (Is. xix. 13; Jer. ii. 16; Ezek. xxx. 13); at this time the capital of Egypt; the seat of idolatry, the house of the celebrated Apis, the original of Jeroboam's calf; a favourite burial-place of the Egyptians. "It embraced a circuit of about nineteen miles, with magnificent buildings; it declined after the building of Alexandria; its very ruins gradually perished, after Cairo rose in its neighbourhood" [*Pusey*]. **Pleasant places**] Heb. the desire. Silver should be desired, but not found, or nettles should possess their pleasant houses. In either sense thorns indicate utter desolation (Is. xxxiv. 13). **7. Visitation**] Vengeance now at hand. **Fool**] False prophets who predicted prosperity will be convicted of folly. The event will test them. **Mad**] A man of the spirit, lit. maddened; pretending to inspiration (Lam. ii. 14; Ezek. xiii. 3; Mic. iii. 11). Those who mock the true prophets shall themselves become fools. **Multitude**] Manifold iniquity. **Hatred**] Great enmity to good men and God. The punishment in proportion to the sin. **8. The watchman**] Looking out, waiting for Divine revelation (Heb. ii. 1). The true prophet always consults God. Ephraim or Israel was designed to be the watchman of God, to witness among the nations for him; but was led by false prophets, whose words were "a snare of the fowler." **In**] Lit. upon *all his ways, i.e.* wherever the people went they were beset with false prophets, who hated intensely the house of God. **9. Deeply**] Lit. gone deep, they are corrupted; deeply immersed themselves in wickedness. **Days**] when Benjamin espoused the children of Belial (Jud. xix. 22; Gen. xix. 4). **10. Like grapes**] with which the traveller delights to quench his thirst. Grapes and early figs a great delicacy in the East (Is. xxviii. 4; Jer. xxiv. 2); so God delighted in Israel at first. He gave them richness and pleasantness, but they corrupted themselves, and no longer answered his good pleasure. **Baal-peor**] The Moabite idol to whom young females prostituted themselves (Num. xxv. 3). **Shame**] that foul idol (Jer. xi. 13). **11. Their glory**] Children the glory of parents, sterility a reproach. **Eph.**]= fruitfulness (Gen. xli. 52, marg.), which characteristic should cease; licentious worship would diminish the people: leave them childless, by threefold gradation. "First, when their parents should have joy in *their birth*, they were to come into the world only to go out of it; then their mother's womb was to be itself their grave; then, stricken with barrenness, the

womb itself was to refuse to conceive them." Cf the threefold stages of failure (ch. viii. 7). **12. Bereave**] them, though they should rear children (Job xxvii. 14). **A man**] Lit. from man. **Woe**] Lit. for woe. God's departure the source of all evil (1 Sam. iv. 21; xxviii. 15, 16). Loss of children sad, but loss of God beyond description. **13. Planted**] Ephraim chosen, and carefully put in soil to grow and flourish, like *Tyre*, a royal city strongly built and pleasantly situated. The image suggested from the name, a fruitful tree (Ezek. xxvi. 27, 28). **Children**] brought forth only to be slain. **14. Give**] As if overwhelmed, the prophet deliberates; prays in compassion, let this never happen; then leaves it with God. **Miscarrying**] Barrenness, usually counted misfortune (Job iii. 3; Jer. xx. 14), will be a blessing, so great will be their calamity. **15. Gilgal**] where they rejected God and chose a king (1 Sam. viii. 7; cf. 1 Sam. xi. 14, 15). **Hated**] Punished their sin (Mal. i. 3). **16. Smitten**] Under the image of a tree, repeats the sentence of God. *Smitten* from above, by blasting and mildew (Am. iv. 9). **Root**] withered, and fruit impossible. **Though**] Before they are entirely dead, fruit may appear, yet *will I slay the beloved* (lit. the desires) fruit of their bodies. **17. My God**] not theirs; supporting my authority and directing my course. **Will cast**] Lit. despises them, and banishes them among the nations (Deut. xxviii. 65), a monument of his anger and a warning to all people (Rom. xi. 20, 21).

HOMILETICS.

The Sinner's Life a Joyless Life.—*Verses* 1—4.

Israel is forbidden to rejoice like other nations. They had forsaken God, and sinned wilfully against light and warning. Their prosperity was attributed to wrong sources. The judgment of God was threatened against them. Other people might enjoy the results of their labours, but they would be deprived of the fruits of the earth and the services of religion. Thus God breaks into the mirth and festivity of the sinner. There is no cause of joy in his present condition or future prospects.

I. His present condition affords no joy. "Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy." All men seek to be happy. The wicked even have a kind of joy, a superficial, short-lived pleasure. But true joy is the good man's portion. "I have enjoyed almost a *fearful* amount of happiness," exclaimed Dr Arnold in reviewing the past. 1. *The sinner forsakes God, the fountain of joy.* "Thou hast gone a whoring from thy God." All true joy springs from him, and is enjoyed only in him, in living for him. What joy so pure as "the joy of the Lord"? Carnal joy is a mere flash, which leaves the mind in deeper darkness and greater misery. Joy in God is like the light of the sun, healthy and lasting. It may be overclouded with mists and storms, but breaks out in greater splendour and sweetness. In God's presence only "is *fulness* of joy" (Ps. xvi. 11); pleasures which satisfy; enough to fill every soul with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Joy is forbidden, withheld from the wicked. The sense of sin robs them of peace (Is. xlviii. 22); their present possessions are no security nor advantage to them. Living in distance from God and at enmity with him, gloomy feelings damp their joy and act as an alloy to their comforts. "In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare; but the righteous doth sing and rejoice." 2. *The sinner fails in his efforts to secure joy.* "The floor and the winefat shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her." Israel doted on prosperity which could not sustain them. The fruits of the earth would fail, and all their efforts would end in bitter disappointment. The sinner turns away from God, and becomes restless and dissatisfied. He loves to hire himself to sin and degradation. He tries first one thing and then another, but all plans and policies utterly "fail them." Men have recourse to every mean shift, submit to the lowest drudgery, and suffer the greatest hardship in pursuit of sin. Like the prodigal, they become wanderers, spendthrifts, and slaves. But the solemn pause comes. They are arrested, alarmed, and astonished. Their pleasures forsake them, and hopes vanish like vain shadows. God curses the blessings and frustrates the efforts of the sinner. "Doomed to disappointment as usual," many continually exclaim. "The wicked man travelleth with pain all his days." **II. His future prospects afford no joy.** Israel was to be deprived

of inheritance, carried into bondage, robbed of sacrifices and public service. All their religious efforts would be rejected and turned into defilement and mourning. It was a sad prospect to be driven from the house of God and a land of plenty! What brighter future has the sinner before him as long as he remains from God? 1. *The sinner's future will be one of bondage.* "Ephraim shall return to Egypt." They knew how hardly Egypt had dealt with their fathers, and how treacherously with them. They had been warned not to go, but were determined to go. Against their own will God would send them into banishment and distress. The sinner will be held in bondage by lusts which he indulges; driven by former habits into greater misery; and find what he thought a place of refuge to be a place of exile. Captivity and exile were additions to the scarcity of home. Future miseries will succeed present distress to the unbeliever. He cannot expect freedom and joy in the service of sin and Satan. The prospect will be no better than the retrospect, and the future worse than the present. "I know that it shall be well unto them that fear God, which fear before him. But it shall not be well with the wicked" (Ecc. viii. 12, 13). 2. *The sinner's future will be one of bitterness and sorrow.* It was hard when Israel had to "eat unclean things," things forbidden by their law, when they were forced to eat or starve, when their bread was polluted and their sacrifices "as the bread of mourners." Sin brings bitterness now and hereafter. (*a*) Bitterness in the *spirit of the sinner.* (*b*) Bitterness in his *forlorn condition.* From affluence and privileges he comes to poverty and want. His experience and his prospects are bitter, bitterness and sorrow past, present, and future. "Let us live on the past," exclaimed Napoleon, but the retrospect was a course of selfish aggrandizement. In thoughts of the future he sickened and pined for death. "I am no longer the Great Napoleon. How fallen I am!" "Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart." 3. *The sinner's future will be one of exclusion from God's inheritance.* "They shall not dwell in the Lord's land." God had chosen Canaan to be the residence of his glory and the possession of his people. But as sin drove man from Paradise, so idolatry drove the Jews out of Canaan. They were disinherited, deprived of God's favour and protection. This is a warning to all who live in the bosom of the Church and under the sound of the gospel. Many professors forfeit present enjoyment and sin away precious privileges. Sinners cannot enter the kingdom of God on earth, and will be excluded from heaven at last. We cannot dwell with God unless we are subject to his authority and obedient to his will. "If thine heart turn away so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. Israel ever wished to joy as other nations. When they cried for a king, they forsook God and sought to exult in their own ways. But the greater the privileges, the greater the guilt in despising them. Other nations were idolators, but Israel's sin was "*whoring* from thy God."

There is always a snare in the ways of sin, always a song in the service of God [*Bridge*].

Ver. 2. *Not feed them.* Punishment attendeth sin at the heels. They had abused their plenty and ascribed it to their idols; therefore shall they be cut short either in their store, as Hag. iii. 6, 10; ii. 16, or in their strength, as Hos. iv. 10; viii. 7. One way or other their hopes shall be frustrated, the creature shall lie to them and not answer their expectation [*Trapp*].

Shall fail. Lit. "shall *lie* to her." Israel had lied to God (Hos. vii. 13). So the fruits of the earth would disappoint and requite her. Men reap as they sow. The punishment as the crime

"When the blessings of God have been abused by sin he in mercy takes them away. He cuts them off, in order to show that he alone, who now withheld them, had before given them. When they thought themselves most secure, when the corn was stored on the floor, and the grapes were in the press, then God would deprive them of them."

Ver. 3. *Not dwell in the land.* 1. The Assyrian captivity was a mark of God's displeasure, the loss of liberty and surrender to a foreign enemy. Men are only free through God, and only remain free as long as they serve him. By apostasy nations lose their independent existence and individuals their freedom and enjoyment. 2. This captivity a great contrast to Israel's former condition as God's people. They ignored the law, and God abandons them. They are "not my people." 3. This captivity was the loss of their possession. No possessions are secure to those who forsake God. 4. With the loss of the land there is peculiar distress, the loss of sacrifice, and the sanctification of life connected with it. Thus men are exiled in lands of impurity, fall into bondage, and deprived of the means of serving God. That which they are now able to do, or wish to do, is not acceptable to God, and will occasion bitter sorrow. "The seeds of our punishment are sown when we sin." *They shall eat unclean things.* Learn—1. *Sin brings want.* Like the prodigal, they were necessitated to eat unclean things, the husks of swine, because they had nothing else. 2. *Sin brings disgrace.* Perhaps the Assyrians despised them, forced them to eat meats forbidden by the law, in scorn to their religion and the profession of it. Those who willingly slight the word will never be honoured to bear witness to it, or if tested for its principles, will renounce their profession of it. A French Protestant Bishop in the sixteenth century, regarded as a pillar of the Reformation, recanted and brought disgrace upon himself and others. His apostasy staggered many Christians, and was a misfortune to his country. When we forsake God we are left to the mercy of the ungodly. 3. *Sin leads to conformity to the world.* Israel voluntarily might conform to heathen customs, as they were not humbled by any affliction. Driven from the land, deprived of their own ritual, they adopted the religion of Assyria, and God left them, gave them up to their own course. They would then appear outwardly what they were inwardly. Men who have only outward profession will soon cast off that when tempted or thrown into the world. "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind," &c.

HOMILETICS.

The Solemn Days of Life.—*Verse 5.*

Israel had sinned away their privileges, and deprived themselves of sacrifices and feasts. What would they do "in the solemn day" when it was impossible to rejoice before the Lord (Num. x. 10)? In captivity they would not be able to celebrate the festivals. The temple would be in ruins, and they would be exiled into a foreign country. "The more solemn the day, the more total man's exclusion, the more manifest God's withdrawal." There are solemn days in our life which we must all meet. How shall we meet them?

I. The day of affliction is a solemn day. "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." Suffering is the law of our being, and co-extensive with our race. As certain as we are born to live we are born to trouble, and our days are "full of trouble." No wealth can purchase, no power effect, deliverance from the common lot. Reverses of fortune, poverty and want, disquietude and fear, prey upon the mind. Inward consumption and outward accidents lay men on beds of sickness. They cannot go to places of amusement, nor enjoy company of pleasure; they are shut out from Christian fellowship, and deprived of all the means of grace; they are on "the bed of languishing" and sorrow. When the world deserts them,

and remembrance of the past distresses them, what will they do? When a Christian is sick God gives ease and health to his soul. "Thou wilt make all his bed in sickness." But "in the day of adversity" what will the sinner do? **II. The day of death is a solemn day.** "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?" Neither by wisdom nor strength can we avoid the common doom. Death spares no rank nor condition, calls with impartial step at the cottage of the poor and the palace of the prince. "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war." Charles V. was advised to retire from danger at the battle of Tunis, but refused, and said that an emperor was never slain with great shot. William Rufus declared that kings were never drowned. But the hero of a thousand fights can claim no exemption here. What a solemn day is this day! What will you do when the physician's skill is of no avail? when millions of money would not buy an inch of time? when there is no help from earth or heaven? The wicked may strengthen himself in wickedness, but he can neither outwit nor overcome his enemy. His "covenant with death and with hell shall be disannulled." "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death." **III. The day of judgment will be a solemn day.** "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." That will be the most solemn day, when the eternal destinies of men are fixed by the Great Judge. *Every work*, great and small, public and private; *every secret thing*, good or bad, the hidden thoughts of the heart and the forgotten sins of youth; "*every idle word* that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." Simeon, a holy bishop, was saluted on his way to martyrdom by Urthazanes, a Persian courtier, and an apostate. But the courtier was frowned upon by the bishop, and cried, "How shall I appear before the great God of heaven, whom I have denied, when Simeon, but a man, will not endure to look upon me? If he frown, how will God behold me when I come before his tribunal?" This led to his reclamation. How will you appear before the Judge? What will you do in *that* solemn day? Will you call to the rocks and to the mountains to fall upon you and hide you? Make your peace with God, and prepare to meet him, "that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

"At his call the dead awaken,
Rise to life from earth and sea;
All the powers of Nature, shaken
By his looks, prepare to flee:
Careless sinner,
What will then become of thee!"

A Sad Picture.—*Verses* 6, 7.

Israel fled to Egypt because of the destruction of their own land, hoping to find help in time of need. But they were disappointed. In Egypt they found their grave (Ex. xiv. 11); they were gathered and buried together (Jer. viii. 2; Job xxvii. 15). Their tents were overrun with nettles, their treasures of silver were in ruins, and the land desolate and without inhabitants. A sad picture of the consequences of sin.

I. Expected refuge turned into destruction. "Memphis shall bury them." Men run away from one trouble only to get into another. Wealth, friends, and the world are tried and fail. Places of refuge prove places of death. They are received and gathered only to be buried. Those who flee from God, expecting life, will be certain to meet their death. They flee from the smoke only to fall into the fire. They seek good and find evil. Calamity sooner or later overtakes the Christless and impenitent from which they cannot escape. They choose death and obtain

their choice. "The eyes of the wicked shall fail and they shall not escape, and their hope the giving up of the ghost" (Job xi. 20). **II. Fruitful land turned into desolation.** 1. Silver, once treasured, had gone. 2. Nettles and thorns grew amid their habitations. 3. The land was swept of its inhabitants. What a scene of desolation and sadness! Sin has cursed the ground on which we tread, and drained many a nation of its prosperity. The cities of the plain were destroyed and "the garden of the Lord" turned into barrenness (Gen. xiii. 10). Where is the glory of Greece, once so famous for arts and sciences? What will become of "England, great, glorious, and free," if she forsakes God, her defence? God can empty our stores, demolish our temples, and diminish our people. Let us take warning. "He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the water-springs into dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein."

HOMILETICS.

Days of Visitation.—*Verses* 7—9.

Israel's sin is one, but the tendencies and the manifestations are many. God had shown them what little cause for joy they had, warned them of the coming day; and now, lest they should slight the warning, declares that retribution is near. "The days of visitation are come."

I. Days of retribution for guilt. "The days of recompence are come." Men deny such days, and seek to delay them, but they come. They come to recompense, to reward men for their ways, and fix their doom. "For the Lord God of recompences shall surely requite" (Jer. li. 56). There is retribution enough to prove a moral government among men—that justice sees and will avenge the wrong, and that hereafter right will be dealt to all. *Nature* tells us that every law must have a penalty, or it is no law. *Reason* teaches that under no government, human or Divine, should the just be as the unjust. As there is no law without penalty, so there is no penalty inflicted but for law violated. "For the multitude of thine iniquity" are the days of visitation come. "Punishment ripens on the tree of evil." "Punishment is justice for the unjust." "Be sure your sin will find you out." **II. Days of bitter experience.** "Israel shall know it." Men will not heed Divine warning. They must know by *feeling* the results of their sins. They cannot check the consequences, not confine them to the outer world when they come. They must experience the bitterness of their course. A man of sin is a man of pains. He lives in sin, eats it up, and it is bitter in his belly (Rev. x. 9). He tastes the wormwood and the gall, and drinks the bitter for the sweet. "Everything that I love, everything that belongs to *me*, is stricken," cried Napoleon. "Heaven and mankind unite to afflict me." Lord Byron declared that his days were "in the yellow leaf"—"the flowers" and the fruits were gone, and "the worm, the canker, and the grief are mine alone." The poet Burns said in dying hours, "I close my eyes in misery, and open them without hope."

> When haughty guilt exults with impious joy,
> Mistake shall blast, or accident destroy;
> Weak man, with erring rage, may throw the dart,
> But Heaven shall guide it to the guilty heart.

III. Days of discriminating character. "The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad." The man pretending to have spiritual inspiration, the prophets predicting prosperity, were mad, and retribution would convince them of their folly. The event would show what spirit was in them. 1. *Character in public teachers is discriminated.* Some called the prophets of God mad men, as Festus thought Paul. Elisha (2 Kings ix. 11), Jeremiah (xxix. 5), and Christ himself were called mad.

For ages the early Christian teachers were considered under the influence of phrenzy or madness. True prophets have never been understood; often called fools and fanatics by those who pretend to higher revelations and superior wisdom. False teachers commend themselves, glory in appearance, and condemn others. Real prophets proclaim their message, are "beside" themselves to God and "sober" to men. They are contradicted in words and blackened in character; but God and time defend their cause. The flatterer will be unmasked, the contrast between the false prophet and the true "watchman" shall be manifest, and it shall be seen that one walked "with God" and the other was "a snare" to the people "in all his ways." "Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit and have seen nothing." 2. *Character in private individuals is discriminated.* Christians have often to bear reproach and maintain a dignified silence; but days of God's visitation, times of persecution, defend their character, and rank them in their position. The wicked tremble and fear, the false professor forsakes God, but the righteous suffer and are glorified. Days of retribution sift character and conduct. Men are forced to confess that the wicked have not the best of it—that there is a God to recompense truth and justice, and reverse the judgments of men. "Then shall ye return (to a better state of mind), and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 7. If we apply the words to religious teachers—1. *It is an unreasonable charge.* Wise men have grounds for their judgment; but it is most unjust to condemn without a cause. These men are servants of God, pure in their life and noble in their aim. 2. *It is a common charge.* In every age when selfishness reigns supreme and scepticism abounds, men of deep convictions and unwearied zeal for God have been regarded as fanatics and madmen. But what appears insanity to some are "words of truth and soberness" to others. 3. *It is a dangerous charge.* Those who deal plentifully in terms of folly may have them flung upon themselves. Events may reverse the judgments of men, and those who call others fools may prove to be the greatest fools themselves. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete," &c.

The great hatred. 1. Against *God.* The carnal mind at hostility with God. The question at issue, the *casus belli*, who shall govern—God or the sinner? Many think they can adore and love God as Creator and Benefactor, while they rebel against him as Lawgiver. Many may love Cromwell, the Queen, or any ruler, for piety and courage, yet condemn the government as harsh and despotic. God's moral government admits not of this distinction. His nature and office, his person and his throne, are inseparable. No neutrality in human affection and conduct. Either at peace or at war with God. 2. Against *God's Law.* The law demands supreme and universal obedience—not only takes cognizance of external actions, but touches the inward springs of all action, weighs the motives and thoughts concealed in the heart. Its rigour never relaxes, its demands never cease. Hence the enmity and resistance. 3. Against God's *servants.* Ahab said of Michaiah, "I hate him" (1 Kings xxii. 8). They hated so intensely (ver. 8) that their whole soul was turned into hatred; they were hatred, as we say, personified; hatred was embodied in them, and they ensouled with hate. They were also the source of hatred against God and man. And this, each false prophet was *in the house of his God!* for God was still his God, although not owned by him. God is the sinner's God to avenge, if he will not allow him to be his God to convert and pardon [*Pusey*].

Ver. 8. *Watchmen and fowlers.* 1 Watchmen walking with God, warning of danger, and urging the people to duty. 2. Watchmen neglecting their duty, and

sleeping at their post. 3. Watchmen turned into fowlers, predicting peace, flattering the people and leading them to destruction. "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me."

Ver. 9. *Deeply corrupted.* Sin corrupts—(1) the understanding, (2) the affections, and (3) the life. Sin corrupts everything it touches. The touch and the taint go together. It leads from bad to worse, and makes men totally and entirely depraved, if not forsaken.

Days of Gibeah (Judges xix.). 1. Days of great lewdness. 2. Days of great shame. 3. Days of great punishment. 4. Days which epitomize Israel's history in guilt and judgment (Rom. i. 32).

Sins and punishment. 1. Contempt of God and his law will draw men into bominable wickedness. 2. When men have plunged into deeper wickedness they cannot recover themselves. 3. There is no wicked course into which men have fallen which the Church, departing from God, may not fall into again. 4. Whatever patience God may have, sinners of one age who fall into guilt will be visited by the same measure as another. As God spared not in the days of Gibeah, so now "he will *remember* their iniquity, he will *visit* their sins."

HOMILETICS.

Honoured and Dishonoured.—*Verse* 10.

These words indicate the great honour that God put upon his people, the great worth which they had in his sight when he chose them, and the great care that he took with them in training them up for his purpose and good pleasure. But they despised this dignity, consecrated themselves to Baal-Peor, and became as abomin able as the idol they loved.

I. God's grace honours a worthless people. What refreshing grapes and the first ripe figs are to the weary traveller, such was Israel at first to God. 1. By nature we are in *a helpless condition.* Education, wealth, and outward distinctions avail not before God. Israel was found *in the wilderness;* in a barren, wild, and solitary place. 2. *God in love seeks men* in their helpless condition. God could not have found Israel, unless he had sought. "I have *found* him in the wilderness" (Deut. xxxii. 10). God goes after men like the shepherd after the lost sheep until he finds them. In love and kindness he restores and exalts them; makes them holy and acceptable in his sight. They are not *found* until restored. "I can wander, but cannot find my way back," was the confession of Augustine. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant." 3. When God finds men he *trains and cultures them for himself.* Grapes and figs indicate continual care and kindness. Israel were planted and trained for God. Their "first ripe" buds and future prosperity came from him. He gave them riches and wealth, pleasantness and odour in the sight of others. They were precious in his sight and honourable (Is. xliii. 4). God honours nations, Churches, and families now, preserves them carefully, and prefers them constantly if they obey him. "The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant" (Is. v. 1, 7). Men are dignified, nations are honoured, not by wealth, fleets, and outward splendour—God's presence makes them glorious, God's grace roots them, causes them to blossom, bud, and fill the world with fruit and sweetness (Is. xxvii. 6). **II. A people honoured by God's grace may dishonour themselves by idolatry.** "But they went unto Baal-Peor, and separated themselves unto that shame," —and *that* was a most shameful and abominable idol. They joined the Moabites in worshipping, in sacrificing, and eating to a god," the filthiest ar l foulest of the heathen

gods (Num. xxv. 2, 3; Ps. cvi. 28). They *separated* themselves, as Nazarites, united devoted themselves to *shame*. The very people whom God exalted and blessed forsook him, sank below others, and dishonoured their own nature (Jer. ii. 21). Is England free? are Christian Churches free from idolatry, debasing in its influence and tendencies? We hate cruel rites and bow not to Pagan gods; but do we not dishonour God and blaspheme his name among others by formalism, hypocrisy, and ungodly lives? We clothe our evil imaginations, our depraved affections, with attributes of power and wisdom, "and change the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image like to corruptible man." **III. The dishonour of a people will be according to the nature of the objects they worship.** "Their abominations were according as they loved." If history proclaims one truth more loudly than another, it is that man becomes assimilated to the moral character of the objects which he worships. The gods and hero-kings, Odin and Thor, of the Scythians were blood-thirsty and cruel—turned "the milk of human kindness" into gall in the bosoms of their votaries, and made them revel in slaughter and scenes of blood. Because heathen deities have destroyed themselves suicide has been recommended, and a natural death thought to exclude from eternal happiness. The more men worship such idols the more they resemble them. Hence the notion that the gods did not like the service, would not accept the sacrifice, of those who were unlike them. Israel became like their loves—shame was the object of their worship, and they had as many abominable idols as they had loves. Their deities corrupted their passions; their passions multiplied their deities, and corrupted their minds and lives. "Man," says an author, "first makes his god like his own corrupt self, or to some corruption in himself; and then, worshipping this ideal of his own, he becomes the more corrupt through copying that corruption. He makes his god in his own image and likeness, the essence and concentration of his own bad passions, and then conforms himself to the likeness, not of God, but of what was most evil in himself." Concerning all false gods the Psalmist says, "They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." Love the world, you become worldly; love God, you become godly. Love has a transforming power which nothing else has. "Nothing else makes good or evil actions," says Augustine, "but good or evil affections. What a man's love is, that he is." "Love the Lord thy God."

Separated unto Shame.—*Verse* 10.

Idolatry is not a harmless mistake, misdirected aim, but a serious evil, the source of all evils. Its consequences are degradation and shame. All sin is shame, and those who separate, devote themselves to sin, separate themselves to shame.

I. This shame is a common experience. Adam and Eve were ashamed, and hid themselves in the garden. Men blush now when caught in the act of sin. They excuse, palliate, and apologize for their guilt. They were ignorant, tempted, and surprised. They are afraid to confess, and seek to cover their shame. If men do not *appear* to blush, they *feel* ashamed. They may be light before men, but serious before God—laugh in public, and sigh in secret. There are sad hearts beneath cheerful faces. "The conscious mind is its own awful world." **II. This shame is a penal suffering.** It is the result of wrong-doing, of broken law. The violation of all natural laws brings suffering—sin brings suffering, and this suffering is shame. It is not a shame to labour, to be poor and afflicted; but it is a shame to sin, and sin will expose a man to shame. The wicked are often put to shame before men. They lose respect and honour, get exposed to contempt and danger. They will be cursed by God in his providence. "Then time turns torment, when man turns a fool." "A wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame." **III. This shame is a threatened punishment.** Believers will "have con-

fidence, and not be ashamed" before Christ at his coming. But the wicked will "rise to everlasting shame and contempt." Once great men of the world seemed wise, and those who denied sinful lusts were fools; but at the judgment day all things will be unmasked and realities seen in their true light. Shame will then be infamous, and disgrace conspicuous to the universe. "The wise shall inherit glory; but shame shall be the promotion of fools." **IV. This shame is often a penitential feeling.** When sin is seen in the light of Divine love, judged by the sufferings of Christ, it is felt to be exceedingly sinful. The penitent regards its pollution, not its punishment, feels ashamed, reproached, and self-condemned. The publican and the Psalmist, Ezra and Nehemiah, Job and Isaiah, all felt ashamed for their iniquities, and cried to God for cleansing and pardon. This is a painful, but hopeful experience. It attracts the notice of God. "He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light."

The Glory and Grief of a People.—*Verses* 11—14.

Ephraim had parted with God, the true glory, and now all in which they gloried should be taken from them. Their posterity should be cut off, their prosperity would decay, and God himself would depart from them. The most powerful tribe of the people became the most miserable, and all its glory was turned into grief.

I. The glory of a people. Fruitfulness and strength were promised to Ephraim in great abundance (Gen. xlviii. 19). Moses had assigned tens of thousands to him, while to Manasseh thousands only were promised (Deut. xxxiii. 17). She was proud of her offspring and increase, of her wealth and situation. 1. *Posterity is considered the glory of a people.* In *families* "children are an heritage from the Lord." We boast of our sons and daughters. In them we love to see our image, hope to perpetuate our name, and secure our fortunes. Like Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, when asked to display our jewels we point to our sons and say, "*These* are my jewels." In *nations* posterity are the hope and foundation of the future. From the rising generation, fathers and mothers, leaders and teachers, are to spring. As "the child is father of the man," so children are the nation's population and prosperity in the bud. Hence to our posterity are entrusted the interests of our commerce, the defence of our throne, and the glory of our name. In them are the germs of national virtues and vices, feelings and sentiments which will determine the character and decide the fate of this empire. "The worth of a state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals comprising it," says J. S. Mill. **II. Outward prosperity is considered the glory of a people.** "Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place." Ephraim, like Tyre, was populous and wealthy; strong and beautifully situated; planted with care, and defended by God. Beauty and strength surrounded her. "Thou hast been in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering," &c. (Ezek. xxviii. 2, 13). So now nations trust to the abundance of their revenues, the beauty of their public buildings, and the strength of their fortifications. England relies on its wealth and position, its armies and its fleets, its philosophy and its morality. But our chief strength, our real power, consists in the characters of the rising generation, the enlightenment of our citizens, and the integrity of our conduct. The nation that has no higher god than pleasure, gold, or position, is poor indeed. Heathen deities often imaged human virtues, but these are vanities to depend upon, and will cause a people's downfall. Glory is false glory when attributed to numbers and wealth, to outward prosperity and empire, to anything short of God. God warns us as he did Israel. "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law—ye shall be left few in number—the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought" (Deut. xxviii. 58, 62, 63). **III. The glory of a people turned into grief.** The glory departed from Ephraim in the destruction of their children

the decay of national prosperity, and the departure of God from their midst. 1. *The loss of children brings grief.* "Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them." This carriage and abortion, death at the very birth of their offspring, would diminish their number, and weaken their nation. (*a.*) *They would die suddenly.* "Their glory shall fly away like a bird." Swiftly cut off, like Job's family, by tornado, whirlwind, or accident. (*b.*) *They would die violently.* "Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer." If any grew up to manhood, they were to be cut off by the sword. (*c.*) *They were to die hopelessly.* "There shall not be a man left." They were reduced in every stage from conception to maturity—to die suddenly and prematurely by ruthless hands and sword. Thus the beauty of all earthly blessings is quickly blasted (Is. lx. 6, 8). Accidents and diseases, "the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noon-day," cut down the hopes of our life. We mourn like Burke at the loss of his only son: "They who should have succeeded me have gone before me. They who should have been to me as posterity are in the place of ancestors." "Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity." 2. *The decay of national prosperity brings grief.* Strong and rich, proud and secure, as Tyre was, Ephraim's glory would fade away like a flower. Riches take unto themselves wings and fly away. Trade may prosper and mechanism flourish; the dew may couch beneath, and the sun shine above; the chief things of the ancient mountains and the precious things of the lasting hills may abound (Deut. xxxiii. 13—16); but the greatness of a nation depends not on the wealth of its population, nor the extent of its territories. Idleness and love of pleasure, idolatry and forgetfulness of God, will cause inevitable decay. The fatal weakness of Athens were free men, outnumbered by slaves, citizens, corrupt in morals, and women unchaste in conduct. The decline and fall of Rome may be traced to the general corruption of the people. Ephraim fell into sin, and her glory departed from her. 3. *The departure of God from a people brings grief.* "Woe also to them when I depart from them." The loss of children was grievous; the decay of present prosperity and future hope sad enough; but God's departure was the source of all evil to them. When God withdraws his presence and providence nothing can sustain a Church or people. When Cain was cut off, and Saul forsaken by God, they became more wicked and miserable. When the ark of God was taken Ichabod was pronounced; for the glory had departed from Israel (1 Sam. iv. 21, 24). Pestilence and famine can turn a nation's glory into grief. Withdrawment of Divine favour can change the pride of the Church into shame, and the hope of the family into grief. God's favour is the sublimest of all joys, all triumphs, and all delights. But woe unto any with whom God is angry and from whom God departs. Present afflictions only foreshadow future judgments. Their sun will set, and darkness cover their lands. "I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us" (Deut. xxxi. 17)!

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 12. *Bring up their children.* How soon could our God insensibly waste the most populous nations! Nay, how often does he thus decrease them! and what awful instances of this has our eventful age exhibited! What an alloy it is to our comfort in our beloved children to reflect for what purposes they may possibly be brought up and reserved! "This is a sore vanity;" but the best remedy of it is submission and confidence in God, and a conscientious performance of our duty: especially in training up our families in the fear of God, and in seeking for them, as well as ourselves, "first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and setting them a good example. Surely it is far

more desirable to be written childless, than to bring up children in the service of sin and Satan [*Scott*].

The destiny of the rising generation and the fate of the nation is in the "Home School." The great German teacher Fröbel declared that the great motto of the people should be, "Let us live for our children." If Simon had thought of what Judas might have been, would not this have affected his treatment of the boy? What if the mother of Napoleon, and of his brother kings and sister queens, had foreseen what became of those around her humble fireside in Corsica? We do not know what part our children may play in life, what joy or sorrow they may cause to millions yet unborn. Think how much depends upon early training!

God's departure. They had *departed* and turned away from or *against* God. It had been their characteristic (ch. iv. 16). Now God himself would requite them, as they had requited him. He would depart from them. This is the last state of privation, which forms "the punishment of loss" in hell. When the soul has lost God, what has it [*Pusey*]?

Woe unto them. 1. In personal bereavement. 2. In national distress. 3. In the hour of death. 4. In the day of judgment. "It shall be well with them that fear God. . . But it shall not be well with the wicked" (Ecc. viii. 12, 13).

HOMILETICS.

Great Wickedness and Great Punishment.—*Verses* 15—17.

In the last part of this chapter God accuses Israel of idolatry, condemns their princes for abetting it, and threatens to cast them off for ever, for "the wickedness of their doings." Notice—

I. **Their great wickedness.** The expressions indicate—1. Their wickedness *began with forgetfulness of God.* "They did not hearken unto him." They rebelled against God, would not do what he commanded, nor abstain from what he forbade. God makes himself known by judgment and mercy; but men disregard his voice, and pursue their ends. 2. Their wickedness was *encouraged by their rulers.* "All their princes are revolters." Political power had no check upon the general corruption. Not one rebuked offence, recalled to virtue, or warned of danger. All had departed, were alienated in heart and mind from God. Judges turned aside, and persisted in sinful ways. Princes committed "the sin of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin." "He who knows how to dissemble knows how to reign," is the saying of many. But the words of Louis IX. of France are more becoming a prince. "If truth be banished from all the rest of the world, it ought to be found in the breast of princes." 3. Their wickedness was *malicious in its design.* "The *wickedness* of their doings." Their sins were not infirmities, but presumptuous, daring evils; not common sins, but the wickedness of their wicked works, the essence of wickedness which excited the anger of God. All sins are evils; but some are "presumptuous sins," sins of greater rebellion and mischief than others. Sins against light and truth, against Divine warnings, and in religious privileges are more wicked than others. Men sin from choice, with eagerness, deliberation, and design. "God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness." 4. Their wickedness was *corrupt in its practice.* Gilgal was the centre and scene of their corrupt practices. Here God gave their ancestors the first-fruits of Canaan, renewed his covenant with them, and rolled away their reproach. The service and sanctuary of God once made the place holy. Now it is a place of idolatry, chosen as a pretext to cover their sin and to make it acceptable to the people. The nature of the place adds to the guilt of the sin. Sins in England are worse than sins in heathen lands, and sins in the house of God are more abominable than sins in the world. Provocations turn God's former loving-kindness into anger, and the place of sanctity may become the place of rejection. "In the land of uprightness they will deal un-

justly" (Is. xxvi. 10); "the faithful city is become an harlot" (Is. i. 21). **II. Great punishment.** Great must be that wickedness which provokes God to hate and reject his people. The judgments were national, and involved every individual in the loss of outward privileges and position. 1. *Exclusion from the house of God.* "I will drive them out of mine house." He will drive them from the privileges of his house, and drive them out of his land (ch. viii. 1). God will disinherit them, and they shall never be restored to the kingdom. God deprives sinful nations of their prestige and position, removes their candlestick for their ingratitude, and rejects them for their wickedness. Unfaithful professors will be driven from his house and robbed of the means of grace. 2. *Smitten by the judgments of God.* "Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit." Their national prosperity was smitten, by visitation from God, by blasting and mildew (Am. iv. 9). If a tree be cut down it may sometimes sprout again (Job xiv. 7); but there was not hope for Ephraim. Root and branch should wither away and die. Nations have flourishing trade, and nobility grand mottoes; but God can destroy their prosperity, pluck them up by their roots, and leave them without power to revive, inwardly or outwardly. He can overturn a people as easily as men uproot a tree. "Utrecht planted me, Louvain watered me, and Cæsar gave the increase," was the inscription on the gates of the college, built by Pope Adrian. But to reprove his folly, some one wrote underneath, "Here God did nothing." We cannot flourish without God. God shall destroy thee for ever; he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling-place, and root thee out of the land of the living. 3. *Rejected in the providence of God.* "My God will cast them away." This is the climax—hated, forsaken, and cast away. They became objects of aversion to God, and "wanderers among the nations" of the earth. (*a.*) They *were divorced from God.* "I will love them no more." They were not any longer his people, and shared not his love. God put the spouse out of his house (*b.*) They *were forsaken of God.* They first forsook him, and he forsook them. Cain was a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth. If God scatters his own elect, because they did not hearken unto him, what impunity can any Christian nation or individual professor have, if they neglect Divine warnings, and do not bring forth fruits according to their high calling? "If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations" (Neh. i. 8). "And among these nations thou shalt find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind" (Deut. xxviii. 65).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 15. *The great wickedness*—idolatry. 1. Turning places of worship and renown into scenes of corruption. 2. Masking present error under the garb of former custom. Plato was reproving a boy for playing at some foolish game on one occasion. "Thou reprovest me," said the youth, "for a very little thing." "But custom," replied Plato, "is not a little thing." Bad custom, consolidated into habit, becomes a tyrant and a curse. 3. Originating God's anger, and 4. Terminating in man's rejection. "Bind not one sin upon another, for in one thou shalt not be unpunished" (Ecclus. vii. 8). 'Wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same shall he be punished" (Wisd. xi. 16).

Ver. 16. Men, Churches, and nations like *trees.* 1. Planted and intended to flourish, watered and cared for by God. 2. Sin brings judgments which smite the root and wither the branches. It corrupts and cuts off the offspring. It leaves men to mourn with Edmund Burke at the loss of his only son: "The storm has gone over me, and I am like one of those old oaks which the hurricane scatters around me. I am stripped of all my honours; I am torn up by the roots; I lie prostrate on the earth." Men give themselves deadly wounds

Professors are cursed as the fig-tree, smitten as the vine, and beaten to the ground. "For the Lord shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water," &c. (1 Kings xiv. 15).

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1—4. *Joy.* The joy of the ungodly is superficial, but for a moment, and not to be compared with the rejoicing of the godly. It is like water taken from the surface, instead of the deep well, and will end quickly and abruptly. "He that makes this mirth and he that likes it—both are fools, and their pleasantness will soon have an end" [*Pemble*].

Ver. 5—7. While the sun shines upon the earthly horizon *the evil days* are put to a distance. We scarcely admit the possibility of a change of scene. We exclude the prospect of dark days as an unwelcome intruder. The young revel in their pleasure, as if it would never end. But oh! the folly, the presumption of creatures born for an eternal existence, and to whom the present life is but the preparation time for a never-ending one, and to whom death is but the door of eternity, so wilfully shutting their eyes to this near approach, determining to live for this life only, and to let eternity take its chance [*Bridges*]. In the day of prosperity there is a forgetfulness of affliction; and in the day of affliction there is no more remembrance of prosperity (Ecclus. xi. 25).

Ver. 9, 10. *Corrupt.* "O Lord, abhor me not, though I be most abhorrible," said the dying Thos. Scott. "My repentance needs to be repented of; my tears want washing, and the very washing of my tears needs still to be washed over again with the blood of my Redeemer" [*Bp. Beveridge*]. There is no vice that doth so cover a man with shame as to be found false and perfidious [*Bacon*]. The disposition of a liar is dishonourable, and his shame is ever with him (Ecclus. xx. 26).

Ver. 11, 12. *Children.* "Better is it to have no children, and to have virtue: for the memorial thereof is immortal; because it is known with God and with men" (Wis. of Sol. iv. 1). "Our children that lie in the cradle are ours, and bear in them those lives which shall yet make them to appear, the boy like the father, and the daughter like the mother" [*Beecher*]. Glory or shame lies in the future of your child, according to your conduct and training.

Ver. 13, 16. *Root.* Any number of depraved units cannot form a great nation. The people may seem to be highly civilized, and yet be ready to fall to pieces at the first touch of adversity. Without integrity of individual character they can have no real strength, cohesion, or soundness. They may be rich, polite, and artistic, and yet hovering on the brink of ruin. If living for themselves only, and with no end but pleasure, each little self his own little god, such a nation is doomed, and its decay is inevitable [*Smiles*].

This is the state of man: To day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope, to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him:
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost;
And,—when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a ripening,—nips his root,
And then he falls, as I do [*Shakespeare*].

CHAPTER X.

Critical Notes.—1. Empty] Luxuriant. Lit. poureth out, emptying itself into leaves; stretching itself far and wide towards foreign alliances (Ps. lxxx. 9, 12); outwardly prosperous, but no ripe grapes, sound fruit to God. **Bringeth**] Lit. sets or prepares fruit from and to itself. **Altars**] multiplied as his fruit. The greater prosperity, the greater ingratitude and idolatry. **2. Divided**] by themselves between God and idols (1 Kings xviii. 21). **He**] Emphat. Jehovah, not the enemy. **Break** Heb. behead—a bold expression. As victims are beheaded, so the horns of the altar shall be broken off (Am. iii. 14). **3. Now**] Lit. soon. **King**] Words of despair Deprived of a king, or in a state of anarchy: forsaken of God for their sin, what could a king do? **To us**] Lit. for us (ch. xiii. 10)? Whatever we have will not avail, if God help not. **4. Words**] without substance and sincerity, nothing but vain talk (Is. lviii. 13). **Falsely**] Their covenants lack truth, and easily broken (2 Kings xvii. 4). **Judgment**] A good and healthy plant to society, springs up and spreads far and wide, like bitter and poisonous *hemlock* in the field. They prepared the soil for judgment by cultivating injustice. Perverted justice is like rank poison, injurious to community. **5. People**] of the calf and idolatrous *priests* shall mourn for the golden calf; their glory can neither help itself nor them. **6. It**] Emphat. It itself, as well as Israel, shall be carried into exile. **7. Sam-**] The capital and the kingdom itself destroyed. **Foam**] A straw or bubble on the water, empty, light, and worthless; others, like a splinter carried away by the current. **8. Sin**] The altars, the buildings connected with image worship. **Thorn**] The place shall be desolate, wild briars shall grow where the victims were once offered. Altars were graves of idols, and monuments of death. The inhabitants in hopeless despair will pray for swift destruction. **Fall**] To bury us from impending ruin, to escape more terrible doom. Spoken of Jerusalem (Luke xxiii. 30), and of the judgment-day (Rev. vi. 16). **9.**] A return to earlier days to prove deeper guilt. **Stood**] As at the beginning, so now they stand, persisting in their sin. Others, though smitten in Gibeah, yet they avenged the sacred character of God's law; but *now* none of the ten tribes took the side of God. The battle shall overtake and utterly destroy them. **10. Desire**] After the manner of men, God longs to punish in severity, to impress the mind. No longer joy over them (Deut. xxviii. 63), but justice without mercy. **Bind**] Lit. at their binding, *i. e.* when God would bind them like oxen ploughing side by side. **Two**] transgressions. Forsaking God, and revolting against the house of David. "The breach of both tables of God's law, or as Jer. ii. 13" [*Pusey*]. **11. Taught**] Trained, accustomed to work. Threshing easier than ploughing; an image of freedom and enjoyment (Deut. xxv. 4; xxxii. 15), of productive labour and prosperity. Now put under the yoke, and employed in servile work. **Ride**] Not mounted, but drive in harness. **12.**] A call to repentance. Sowing and reaping = moral conduct **In**] Lit. for *right*, which must be the fruit. **Reap**] in the proportion of mercy, not justice; mercy from God and from man; mercy in both this and the world to come. **Fallow**] Plough virgin soil, cultivate fresh land (Jer. iv. 3). New soil required, begin anew. **Seek**] With anxiety and diligence persevere *till* you find God. **Rain**] in copious blessings (Ps. lxxii. 6; Is. xlv. 8). **Righteousness**] which he will teach you, and generate by the Holy Spirit (Ps. li. 12). **13.**] Another reason for reformation. **Ploughed**] Been at pains to sow wickedness and reaped the fruit of it. **Iniquity**] itself is the soil which they cultivated, the seed and the fruit; its own natural reward. **Lies**] A just reward for their idolatry, the fruit was bitter and unprofitable. **Thy way**] Perverse way (Is. lvii. 10; Jer. ii. 23); they trusted to Egypt and their calves, not to Jehovah. **14. Tumult**] War (Am. ii. 2). **People**] Lit. peoples, "not, as God willed them to be, one people, for they had no principle of oneness or stability, who had no legitimate succession, either of kings or of priests" [*Pusey*]. Against *all* Israel and the tribes connected with her should tumultuous war arise. **Shal-**] Shalmanezer king of Assyria. **The mother**] and children, inhuman cruelty, commonly practised (2 Kings viii. 12; Is. xiii. 16; Ps. cxxxvii. 8). **15. Bethel**] The seat of idolatry prepares this destruction for the people. **Wick-**] Lit. the evil of your evil. "Wickedness in its second potency, extreme wickedness" [*Keil*]. **Morning**] In the hope from alliance with Egypt against Assyria, when prosperity was expected to dawn; or suddenly and surely shall the kingdom be utterly cut off.

HOMILETICS.

The Abuse of Outward Prosperity.—*Verses* 1—4.

Israel is now accused of fruitlessness and selfishness. God blessed them with abundant prosperity, but it was abused. The increase of their wealth only tended to the increase of sin; the multiplication of images; the spread of deceit and perjury. They were good for nothing, a degenerate vine, luxuriant in leaves, but empty before God (Ezek. xv. 3, 5).

I. Outward prosperity used for selfish ends. "He bringeth forth fruit unto himself." Whatever fruit they had was expended on self. "Life," says Carlyle, "begins with renunciation." The worldly man believes that life begins in getting, is enjoyed by keeping, and that he who renounces most will have the least. Men, like Israel, seek refuge from trouble and pleasure in life, by living in a world of their own. 1. *Self was considered the source of their prosperity.* Man is his own creator and redeemer, self-sufficient and strong, in their estimation. All selfishness is self-assertion, a practical repudiation of our helpless and sinful condition. The gospel alone can break down the rule of self, and bring Christ as the object of love and obedience. 2. *Self was considered the end of their prosperity.* Israel refused culture. Men are self-willed, live not for God, but for their own lusts and aggrandizement. They detest and will not forgive in others what they indulge in themselves. Grasping in their disposition, using God's gifts for self, they dedicate wealth and business to self. Everything is expended for gratification, honour, and position. Prosperity is abused, the right of our fellow-men and the claims of God are disregarded. Men deny their stewardship, and retributive justice takes their unlawful gains. "When ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?" (Zech. vii. 6). **II. Outward prosperity used in disregard to God.** In living for self they had no regard to the claims of their God. Reason and revelation teach that God should be the supreme object of affection. But selfishness seeks to rival God and alienate our love from him. 1. *This disregard springs from divided allegiance.* "Their heart is divided." "They were fearers of the Lord, and they were servers of their gods" (2 Kings xvii. 32, 33). They would give up neither, but tried to worship both. We cannot serve God and Mammon (Matt. vi. 24). One object must be supreme in our mind. If we cast off God, then Mammon will govern, in some form, our thoughts, feelings, and purposes. A divided heart is a faulty heart. God will not have part, but the whole service. There must be no halting between God and Baal. Decision must be made now before it be too late. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" 2. *This disregard is clothed in the forms of devotion.* They had altars and idols, a fair show of profession, and outward forms; but their piety emptied itself in transient feelings and false notions. Like many now who make a fair show in the flesh, but do not produce the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, and peace. "Fruits unto holiness and to God" are acceptable; but fruits unto selfishness are "nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned" (Heb. vi. 8). What a mockery to put on the garb of religion, when the heart is divided and alienated from God! Alas! what empty vines in the Christian Church in this very day! Those who seek their own credit or worldly profit in religious duties will be accounted unfaithful branches. But all who abide in Christ, will bring forth fruit to the glory of God and the benefit of men. 3. *This disregard is in proportion to their outward prosperity.* "According to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images." Enriched by the produce of their land, they made beautiful images, increased their ingratitude and sin. The greater God's blessings to men, the more they abuse his gifts. The more God lavishes favours upon them, the more determined are they to adore themselves and worship their idols. Flourishing trade begets wealth; wealth begets pride; and pride self-sufficiency. Men grow in sensuality, avarice, and wickedness. Prosperity destroys the piety of some men. The sun shines, dulls and extinguishes the fire. The insidious influence of prosperity may be seen in William, Duke of Normandy, whose bravery and candour gained respect at a distance, but in the possession of power fell into contempt among his friends and subjects. Macaulay gives an instance in the Earl of Tarrington, who rose into a hero in poverty and exile, but sank again into a voluptuary in prosperity. "I was ruined by too easy success in early life," said some one. "In all time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us." "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them." **III. Outward prosperity abused will bring punishment.** "He shall break down their altars,"

&c." The sin of Israel became the very means of their punishment. The gold with which they beautified their idols tempted the invader, and involved them in hopeless ruin. Their own idols became their own misery. All who pursue pleasure and ambition, who give themselves to earthly idols, will, through their heartlessness and idolatry, lose both God and their own selves, and become a castaway at last. Kings and princes, creature-comforts and creature-confidences, will not avail, when God is lost. "Because we feared not the Lord, what then should a king do for us?" Every idolized dependence will soon be torn away from those who fear not God. Nothing can help them in their distress. Suffering and remorse, regrets and unavailing self-reproach for ever, will be their portion. "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?" (2 Kings vi. 27).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. *Vine.* The Christian Church is a vine brought out of Egypt, an unfriendly soil, displacing old trees, and planted in its position by God's hand (Ps. lxxx. 8—11). Hence the parallel between the Church and a vine. 1. Its transplanting from an unfruitful to a fertile soil. 2. Its careful keeping. 3. Its grand design—to bear fruit. Then (*a*) it is beautiful, (*b*) useful, (*c*) acceptable to God. If empty and fruitless, it is just the reverse of all this, entirely worthless. The sap of life, the energies of mind, in some men and in some Churches, spent in ambitious schemes, luxuriant leaves and professions. The grace and gifts of God are received in vain. All things "bloom their hour and fade."

Nothing but leaves! The Spirit grieves
Over a wasted life;
O'er sins indulged while conscience slept,
O'er vows and promises unkept;
And reaps from years of strife—
Nothing but leaves! nothing but leaves!

Ver. 2. *A divided heart. I. A fearful disease.* 1. It affects a vital part. 2. It affects after the most deadly fashion—a *divided* heart. 3. It is peculiarly loathsome. 4. It is one difficult to cure. It is chronic, got into the very nature of man. 5. It is a flattering disease. *II. Its usual symptoms.* 1. One of the most frequent is *formality* in religious worship. 2. Another, *inconsistency.* 3. Another, *variableness in object.* 4. *Frivolity in religion* is another symptom. *III. Its sad effects.* 1. A divided heart makes the man himself unhappy. 2. He is *useless in the Church.* 3. A man *dangerous to the world.* 4. The most solemn is, *reprobate in the sight of God. IV. Its future consequences.* Terrible will be the condition of the hypocrite at the judgment-day. He will be separated from the righteous and found among those whom he taught and reproved. If your heart is *broken*, it differs from a divided heart. There is hope and pardon for you. God can give a new heart [*Spurgeon*].

1. The sin—a divided heart. 2. The guilt—"found faulty." 3. The punishment—"he shall break down," &c. God will convince the most obstinate of their guilt, if not by the word now, by his judgments hereafter. If they do not suppress, but constantly maintain their sins, God will take the work in his own hands, destroy the monuments of idolatry at their own expense. "*He* shall break down. . . *He* shall spoil."

The state of the heart is the source of the evil. As long as this does not belong to him, so long will men rob him of his own. God will have the heart as his alone, and suffers none to share that possession [*Lange*].

Ver. 3. If men fear not God, but seek to ward off his judgments, by continuing in sin and trusting to kings and great men; their defence will become a snare, and their confidence will be turned into disappointment. Men cannot shelter when God is angry. "What then should a king do for us?" "These are words of despair, not of repentance; of men terrified by the consciousness of guilt, but not coming forth out of its darkness; describing their condition,

not confessing the iniquity which brought it on them. Without love the memory of their evil deeds crushes them beyond hope of remedy. They groan for their losses, their sufferings, their fears, but do not repent."

HOMILETICS.

PERJURY JOINED TO HYPOCRISY.—*Verse* 4.

Their dissimulation of heart was seen in their lives and general conduct. They made no conscience of their duty. There was no dependence upon anything they said or did. The whole nation was corrupt.

I. There was no truth in their words. "They have spoken words." Mere words, empty vain words, without any truth or substance. Great swelling words, full of noise and profession, to gain their point and bear down the prophets; words foolish as they were bombastic, to veil their deceit and decoy to sin. The mouth should always express the heart. Pythagoras said he would rather his disciples should throw stones at random than utter a false word. "Speak fitly, or be silent wisely," says Geo. Herbert. "The turn of a sentence," says Bentham, "has decided the fate of many a friendship, and, for aught that we know, the fate of many a kingdom." "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." **II. There was no sanctity in their oaths.** "Swearing falsely." Whatever be the form of an oath, the signification is the same. We call God to witness, or notice what we say. The offender therefore sins in the presence of God, and in defiance of the sanctions of religion. His sin implies contempt of God's power and justice, man's wants and confidence. "Perjury, therefore," says Paley, "in its general consequence, strikes at the security of reputation, property, and even of life itself. A lie cannot do the same mischief, because the same credit is not given to it." "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths." **III. There was no faithfulness in their covenants.** "Falsely in making a covenant." In their agreements one with another, in their allegiance to their kings, they could not be depended upon. In treaties with foreign nations they concealed their treacherous intentions, and observed them only so long as they were benefited by them. In covenanting with God they promised to be faithful, yet supported idolatry and rebelled against their lawful sovereign. They uttered and acted lies. No considerations can justify the sacrifice of truth, which ought to be supreme in all the engagements and relations of life. Truth is the very bond of society, without which it will dissolve into anarchy and chaos, or cease to exist. A household cannot be governed by lying and perjury; neither can a nation. Sir Thos. Browne was once asked, "Do the devils lie?" "No," he answered, "for then even hell could not subsist." **IV. There was no justice in their judgments.** "Thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field." An unjust king sets a bad example to his people. A corrupt court will make a corrupt nation. If the fountain be bitter, the streams cannot be sweet. How sad when judgment is perverted by those who should administer it! when injustice like a bitter plant poisons the life, and spreads in the manners of a nation. If men sow injustice, they will reap a harvest, full and obnoxious, "as hemlock in the furrows of the field." Penn's advice to his children was good: "Let *justice* have its impartial course, and the law free passage. Though to your loss, protect no man against it, for you are not above the law, but the law above you. Live, therefore, the lives yourselves you would have the people live, and then you have right and boldness to punish the transgressor. Use no tricks, fly to no devices to support or cover *injustice;* but let your hearts be upright before the Lord, trusting in him above the contrivances of men, and none shall be able to hurt or supplant you." "We will sell justice to none," is an article in the Magna Charta. Want of up-

rightness will overthrow a people, "turn judgment into wormwood" and gall; but "the king by judgment establisheth the land" (Prov. xxix. 4; Amos v. 7).

THE VANITY OF EARTHLY GLORY.—*Verses* 5—8.

God was the true glory of Israel. But they had exchanged God for the golden calves, and turned their glory into shame. A day of visitation was near. Their gods would be taken away and given to others. They would be left in sorrow and shame, in captivity and helplessness. All earthly glory departs from us. God alone abides with us a rock and defence.

I. Earthly glory is unsatisfactory in its nature. "Like foam upon the water." (*a*) It is *superficial*. It is only the outside, the surface of things. It does not belong to the man himself, and does not enter the heart. Honour and applause, position and wealth, obstinately remain outside, and only gild the surface. Like flowers in the icy regions, they may cover the ground, when the soil underneath may be intensely frozen. (*b*) It is *light*. Like a straw in the balance of blessings. It stands for nothing in the sight of God and in the estimation of a true man. It may be admired and envied by the vulgar crowd; but it is only "vanity turned into a god" (*c*) It is *unsatisfactory*. What avails the pomp and grandeur of earth? Men have shared all the glory the world can give, and have been willing to resign it for real happiness. Goethe possessed splendid health and power, gained more success and sufficiency than most men, and yet confessed that in the course of his whole life he had not enjoyed five weeks of genuine happiness. The Caliph mentioned by Gibbon, who expended three millions on the palace of Zehra, declared that he had lived 50 years in victory or peace, beloved by subjects, feared by enemies, and respected by all—that riches, honour, power, and pleasure had waited on his call, and that no earthly blessings were wanting to his felicity. But "in this situation I have diligently numbered the days of pure and genuine happiness which have fallen to my lot—they amount to *fourteen*." Such estimates may be exaggerated, but on all earthly glory is written "vanity of vanities." **II. Earthly glory is uncertain in its tenure.** "For the glory thereof, because it is departed from it." Kings and princes may be dethroned; palaces and high places consumed by fire; children and friends cut off by death; change in condition, disappointment in purpose, failure in life, may eclipse all our glory, and leave us in privation and sorrow. (*a*) It is *hard to secure*. What intense anxiety and self-denial, what severe toil and pressure, it costs! If gained at all, it is often at the sacrifice of comfort and life. (*b*) It is *difficult to retain*. When we do secure it, how often, how suddenly, does it elude our grasp! It is transitory in its existence, often taken away and given to others, "carried into Assyria for a present to king Jared." If it does not leave us, we have often to leave it, just when we should enjoy it. Notwithstanding anxiety and effort to get it, elation and pride in possessing it, men must *leave* their glory. Power and personal attire, rank and riches, must all be left behind. "And *where* will ye leave your glory?" **III. Earthly glory will leave its devotees in shame.** "Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel." This will be the end, the portion of all pursuits apart from God. 1. *This shame often reverses the skilful policy of a nation.* The special counsel of Israel was that which Jeroboam took, worldly wise, and admirably suited their immediate design. It was artfully devised, long in its existence, and successful in its stroke. The people were separated from Jehovah, and a kingdom founded apart from Judah. But the policy of rulers often becomes their destruction and shame. Success which may uphold a family or a kingdom, ultimately becomes fatal, "o'erleaps itself, and falls on the other side." "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." 2. *This shame often covers all ranks of the nation.* (*a*) *Kings* are dethroned. "Her king is cut off" (ver. 8). Hoshea seemed in a hopeful way of regaining peace and prosperity. But these promising appearances were like the

bubble on the water, they soon vanished and came to nothing. The king was slaughtered. Whatever we set up and adore instead of God may be carried away by the current of affairs and leave us vexed and disappointed. (*b*) *Priests* will mourn. "The priests thereof that rejoiced in it." Their gains and their glory were all taken away with their idolatrous worship. Men who derive credit and emoluments from illicit trades and sinful practices will regret their choice, and turn their joy into shame. (*c*) The *people* grieved. "The people thereof shall mourn over it." They would regret the loss of their idols. They were in "fear" when they saw the judgment of God against them (Ex. xii. 12). Their protectors were destroyed and they were undone. Ignorant, deluded people will lament bitterly at the loss of their idols. "You have taken away my gods, and what have I more?" 3. *This shame often dishonours the whole land of the nation.* (*a*) Its *high places* are destroyed (ver. 8). Mountains of defence, palaces of splendour, and shrines of religion, if consecrated to evil, will be levelled to the ground. Whatever place or power creates and upholds idolatry will be destroyed. Houses of iniquity will be thrown down, and one stone shall not be left upon another. (*b*) Its *altars* are desecrated. "Thorns and thistles shall come up on their altars." The fires of idolatry should be extinguished, the altars should be broken and covered with briars. Monuments of wickedness are often the grave-stones of hope and monuments of desolation. Seats of idolatry will defeat the governors, tarnish the glory, and terminate the existence of a nation which rears and relies upon them. "Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 5. 1. The *vanity* of idols, when those who worship them cannot depend upon them, but have to be concerned about them in sorrow and affliction. 2. The *ignominy* of idols, when they turn *Bethel* into *Beth-aven*, places of holiness into scenes of degradation. 3. The *power* of idols, when they corrupt the priesthood and draw away the people. 4. The *glory* of idols, a borrowed glory, nothing to commend it but novelty and success, will at length vanish away by the judgments of God.

Ver. 6. Men cast down by their own counsels. 1. Because actuated by false principles. 2. Because they aim at corrupt ends. 3. Because they disregard God. Plans likely to succeed, hindered and rendered abortive by God's providence. Pharaoh counselled against Israel to his own destruction. The destruction of the wicked caused by their own sin (Job xviii. 7). Take counsel from God, and consult his word (Ps. lxxiii. 24; cxix. 24).

It is one of the saddest ingredients of a conquered people's affliction when conquerors take occasion to triumph over their religion, because they are subdued [*Hutcheson*].

Without the grace of God men mourn, not their sins, but their idols [*Pusey*].

Ver. 7. *Kings cut off.* 1. God's judgments against human authority. 2. The highest human authority unable to ward off God's judgments. Men of the greatest weight but vain show (Ps. lxii. 9). Only like grass (Jas. iv. 14), and evanescent as spray on the surface of the sea.

The kingdoms of the earth are like "foam upon the waters." 1. For their seeming brightness. 2. For their great eminence. 3. For their instability and inability to resist. 4. For their sudden fall and disappearance [*Trapp*].

Separated from God, all seeming power is weakness, all apparent stability is fluctuating and perishing as the foam. "One moment white, then gone for ever." Let England beware of all complicity with Romish idolatry, on the false plea of state expediency. For idolatry in any form, whether veneration of images, adoration of the mass, or worship of mammon — another of our national

temptations—is sure to make the greatest seeming stability to become frailty and transitoriness itself. The fear of God is the only true basis of solidity and permanence [*Fausset*].

HOMILETICS.

DEATH SOMETIMES PREFERABLE TO LIFE.—*Verse* 8.

The high places of Israel were so defenceless, their lot was so severe, and their punishment so great, that they preferred death, entire destruction, to life. Present death would be chosen, rather than future miseries, and the shame that those miseries would bring upon them. Men sometimes prefer death to life.

I. In personal distress. Men in disappointment and fretfulness have wished for death. Impatient of life, they have prayed God to take it away. Elijah (1 Kings xix. 4) and Jonah (iv. 3) are striking examples. But in poverty and deep affliction it would often be a relief to die. The soldier on the battle-field, wounded and burning with thirst, feels that death would lessen his misery. When victims of painful and incurable disease, and bereft of those we love dearest, life seems to us to have lost everything attractive and desirable. Job cursed the day of his birth, and would rather have been shut up in the womb (iii. 11, 20). Bitter sorrows, added to a bitter spirit, make life a torment, not a blessing. Wherefore is life given "unto the bitter in soul?" Take it away, suggests Satan often, it is better to die than live in such circumstances. If life is a grief, better not have been born, or rid yourself of the trouble by suicide, was the doctrine of heathen philosophy. In times of outward trouble and inward conflict God alone can "administer to a mind diseased." Grace helps a man to live in the greatest privations and to die in the greatest comforts. We are only prepared to die when we are prepared to live. "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." **II. In national calamity.** Israel's glory was consumed; her seats of idolatry, Samaria and Bethel, were destroyed, and there was no way to break through the danger nor escape the judgment. They were surrounded by evils worse than death. Annihilation would have been a blessing. Nations are sometimes covered with shame and dishonour. Famine, sword, and pestilence have destroyed their population. Their idolized gods are worthless as refuse in the street; their defenced cities and mighty men are laid in the dust, and the remnant left to misery and despair. The chosen people becomes an "evil family," and the splendid nation shall be "for dung upon the face of the earth. And death shall be chosen rather than life, by all the residue of them that remain" (Jer. viii. 3). **III. At the day of judgment.** These words predict the awful misery of some at the great day of accounts. The ungodly will seek annihilation, not from the torment of suffering, but from the wrath of God before whom they stand. Opportunities lost and judgments despised. Life spent and hope for ever gone; despair will seize the soul. There will be no shelter, and prayer will be in vain to the mountains and hills. By the aid of death they cannot escape death (Rev. vi. 16). "In those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them."

IMITATING THE SINS AND SUFFERING THE PUNISHMENT OF OTHERS.—*Verses* 9, 10

In the days of Gibeah, grievous sins were committed and punished. But Israel had not heeded the warning. They had now no zeal for God, nor fear of judgment. They had sinned and continued to sin in imitation of former days. The terrible battle in Gibeah did not overtake some; now not a mere battle, but something far worse shall come upon them. Though God "doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," yet he longs, has determined to punish, and will gather heathen nations against them in overwhelming numbers. Those who partake in other men's sins will suffer other men's punishment.

I. We commit other men's sins by patronizing their works. The sins of Gibeah, the calves of Jeroboam, were all upheld and patronized by high and low in Israel. Kings and priests not only consented, but contrived to make the people sin. The people approved and carried out the bidding of their superiors. All were guilty. We may be afraid to resist and reprove, but if we silently consent and support evil deeds, we are guilty of partaking in them. Saul did not stone Stephen, but consented, approved of his death, and accused himself of the deed (Acts xxii. 20). "Neither be partaker of other men's sins." **II. We commit other men's sins by following their example.** If you sin because another sins, you are guilty of your own act, and will share in the punishment of their sins. Bad examples are not landmarks to guide, but warnings to caution. Nothing forces you to walk in their steps, for then you would not be responsible and free. Examples draw men, and by imitating them they fall into habitual sin. The eye and the ear are inured. Many have fallen into habits of swearing, drinking, and scoffing by the practice of others. Young men indulge in filthy conversation, because incited by their evil companions. Infidelity is a repetition of the first lie, and imbibed by others from example. By imitating evil examples we establish and perpetuate national sins, influence national opinions and customs, and decide national destiny. "O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah." **III. We suffer the punishment by committing the sins of others.** "The people shall be gathered against them." Israel could not escape. By their idolatry they had bound themselves in slavery. The Assyrians, with their allies, would gather against them at God's call. God had determined to punish, and appeared to take pleasure in so doing. In every age, in every Church, those who copy the example and emulate the crimes of antiquity will be bound by their own fetters and delivered into the hands of their enemies. If nations revive in this the sins of a former age, and commit them in succeeding ages, they will fill up the measure of their iniquity. The sins of fathers and predecessors will be visited upon their children. 1. This punishment is determined by God. "It is my desire that I should chastise them." 2. This punishment will not be avoided by their own defence. They would unite their strength, fix themselves for defence like oxen yoked together in the plough. "As the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES

Ver. 9. *From the days*, &c. I. Sin aggravated. 1. By continuance from age to age. 2. By neglect of Divine warning. (*a*) In preserving some, "did not overtake," (*b*) in punishing others. Benjamin did not escape. Reduced to six hundred men. II. Sin ripened for punishment. 1. When imitated and propagated by posterity. 2. When provoking God to anger.

Conjunction of strength and forces to uphold sinful courses will not avail any nation against God's wrath.

Ver. 10. God can bring in his armies at his pleasure, for all creatures are at his beck and check. He never need want a weapon to chastise his rebels. All creatures in heaven and earth will present their service. How ready are the Assyrians here to be the rod in his hand [*Trapp*].

O the venomous nature of sin that maketh the merciful God to desire and to delight in men's miseries; to take comfort in their punishments (Ezek. v. 13, 15), to laugh at their destruction. And although he bear long with men's evil manners (Acts xiii. 18), yet he beareth them as a burden whereof he desireth to be eased (Is. i. 24), as a servitude whereof he desireth to be freed [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

SEEKING TO ENJOY THE COMFORTS AND REFUSING THE DUTIES OF RELIGION.—*Verse* 11.

The metaphors in this and the next verse are taken from husbandry. Israel, like an ox, was trained to tread out corn, and loved this easy luxuriant service. God had forbidden to muzzle the ox (Deut. xxv. 4). It enjoyed freedom and partook of the results of its labour. Israel served in ease, waxed fat and kicked in prosperity, but refused in adversity. This is typical of many who serve God for selfish ends, who seek to enjoy the pleasures of religion, but refuse its duties. Now this conduct does not commend itself.

I. It is unreasonable. We do not expect wages without work, nor can we reap without sowing. Besides, the joy is in the labour itself. We work with delight when the heart is willing. In all labour performed in a spirit of love there is profit. The service of God is a reasonable, a most delightful service. He is not a taskmaster, for his yoke is easy and his burden light. **II. It is ungrateful.** 1. *It is not returning according to benefits received.* If God has blessed us with gifts and graces, health and strength, should we refuse to thank him? Are we not under deep obligation to make some return? 2. *It is manifesting the disobedience of a child.* Children are indebted to parents, should be dutiful and obedient. But if after all the care and special training of the child, he is rebellious and selfish, how unkind, how unreasonable! Yet God prospers and blesses men, trains them up in ease and comfort, but they forget and forsake him. 3. *It indicates the stubbornness of a beast.* A pampered horse kicks and refuses to draw. The wild ass loves to roam in freedom and shuns the yoke. So many love the privileges and cherish not the spirit of the gospel; seek their own ease in Zion, and labour not for the good of others. **III. It is selfish.** Religion is not a rapture, but a habit; not a sentiment, but a life. Many nurse their feelings and forget their duties. Like Peter, they would always dwell on the mount, and forsake the market-place and the shop. Instead of living on earth, amid the dangers and trials of service, they seek to rise into ecstasy, and soar into the third heavens. There is nothing honourable or honest in this. It is selfish and crafty to shun our daily duty. We must deny ourselves, count our master worthy of all honour and homage, "that the name of God be not blasphemed." **IV. It is impossible.** 1. *It violates the order of nature.* Everywhere action and enjoyment go together. The lark sings when it soars aloft on its wings. The child laughs merrily when it plays. The beauty and vigour of the body result from exercise. So the happiness of religion springs from a consciousness of duty done. The sphere of activity is higher than that of passivity. It is more blessed to give than receive, and the highest blessedness consists in the legitimate exercise of the highest powers. This is the law of our being, and makes us like God, who is "blessed for evermore." 2. *It contradicts the will of God.* God's law is the rule of our life and obedience the source of our happiness. God is only pleased with those who love and obey him. "Ye are my friends, if ye *do* whatsoever I command you." We must not seek our own will, but follow him who "pleased not himself." We cannot possess the comforts unless we live the life of the righteous. We cannot eat unless we work. The pleasures of religion must not be separated from the duties of religion. "If ye know these things happy are ye if ye do them."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Spiritual husbandry. 1. Some *tread out corn*, to provide *seed* for the fields of labour. 2. Some *plough*, to prepare the ground to receive it. 3. Others *harrow*, break the clods to cover the seed when sown. Men are often united, as well as separated, in the work of God. Each a work of his own, yet all co-operate for the general good.

Methods of training men for God's

service. 1. By gentle work, attractive enjoyments, an easy yoke. 2. By harder bondage, if easy labour will not win. When mild measures fail, God often tries harsh measures. Men have to plough, break up clods, if they love the ease and shun the toils of religion. 3. Yet even then God displays mercy, handles them gently, as we put the yoke tenderly on a young untamed animal to inure it to labour. In judgment God remembers mercy. But if the mercy be despised and the work refused, the judgment will be the heavier. God would set a rider in Ephraim to tame and subdue them. "Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads."

> The gods are just, and all our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to scourge us.

HOMILETICS.

The Call to Reformation of Life.—*Verses* 12, 13.

God calls the people to repentance in figurative language. Sowing and reaping denote spiritual and moral conduct, closely related as labour and reward. Israel are to give up their former habits, begin afresh, and enjoy the blessings promised.

I. A present duty. "Sow to yourselves in righteousness." All life is a moral sowing and reaping. The works of time are the seeds for eternity. But this sowing must be no surface work. 1. *Fallow ground must be broken up.* "Break up the fallow ground." Virgin soil must be ploughed, and life must be entirely new. The sinner must forsake old habits and practices, turn up the weeds and roots of evil within, and be renewed in the spirit of his mind. The heart must be cleansed from lusts and corruption. Old things must pass away, and all things become new. The Christian must break up all formality, and cultivate new ground. He must grow in grace and holiness, forget the things behind, and look forward to those before. The Church must stir up decaying piety and dying members; grow in numbers and in beauty, and by prayer and effort become a fruitful field. 2. *Proper seed must be sown.* (*a*) *Sow in righteousness.* Return to the practice of righteousness and obedience to the law, which is the rule of righteousness. Abound in works of piety as the *fruit*, the proof of your penitence. Sow to the spirit (Gal. vi. 7, 8), and not to the flesh. (*b*) *Sow with intelligence.* Understand the nature of the work you have to do. Grow in personal acquaintance with God and his word. Abound in wisdom and in knowledge. (*c*) *Sow with diligence.* Put forth constant and earnest, not mere occasional, effort. We must plough, sow, and continue to labour, to reap the benefit. "In the morning sow thy seed; and in the evening withhold not thine hand" (Ecc. xi. 6). The exercise of charity and penitence must be ever active; not fitful impulse, but daily habits; not confined to outward formalities, but thorough inward feeling. If righteousness be our aim, God will make it our portion. He will not reward with ciphers instead of gold, like the world. "The wicked worketh a deceitful work (which disappoints); but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward" (Prov. xi. 18). 3. '*God must be sought.* "Seek the Lord." Husbandmen depend upon God, who gives seed-time and harvest. He should therefore be sought and served. He alone gives strength to secure righteousness, and creates it within the soul by the Holy Spirit (Ps. li. 12). (*a*) *Seek diligently.* Do not leave off, nor desist, but persevere until you find him. (*b*) *Seek earnestly.* There are difficulties in the way, reluctance and opposition to overcome. Do not rest satisfied without a personal acquaintance, nor stop short of attaining the object. Though not found immediately, "seek the Lord, *till* he come." **II. An urgent reason.** "For it is time to seek the Lord." It is always time to seek the Lord. But the unconverted especially are urged to do so. 1. *The Scriptures urge them.* "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, to-day, if ye will hear his voice." 2. *Common observation urges them.* Much of their time has been spent in sin and

wretchedness. Life is uncertain, and opportunities are few. He that loses time loses wealth, life, and all. "I have lost a day," cried the ancient Emperor. Time lost can never be regained. "Millions of money for an inch of time," cried Elizabeth, but her days were spent and could not be recalled. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." 3. *Past experience urges them.* "Ye have plowed wickedness," &c. The past had been spent in labour and intense thirst for happiness, but they had reaped nothing but sorrow and disappointment. (*a*) *Their efforts were fruitless.* They ploughed and sowed, and reaped what they sowed. The harvests of their ill-doings were iniquity and the results of iniquity. The sinner gains nothing with all his toil. He spends his money for that which is not bread, and his labour for that which satisfieth not (Is. lv. 2). "They that plough iniquity and sow wickedness, reap the same." (*b*) *Their confidence ensnared them.* They trusted in their own devices and in the number of their mighty men; but their valiant men were slain, the kingdom came to nought, and their civil and sacred projects were lying vanities. Men's carnal confidences draw them into sinful courses; whatever fruit they promise, or whatever present comforts they bring, they will end in bitter experience. They are lies, and will deceive. "Ye have eaten the fruit of lies." **III. A blessed result.** "Till he come and rain righteousness upon you." 1. *If they seek the Lord he will be found.* Those who humbly and earnestly seek God shall not seek in vain. He will "*come*" to them, annihilating the distance, hastening the meeting, and removing every impediment. "Seek, and ye shall find." 2. *If they sow in righteous works they shall "reap in mercy."* Be merciful to men, and they will be merciful to you. Abound in acts of love and piety towards God, and he will return good measure, pressed down and running over. As children of misery, we all need mercy. If we give it, we shall get it both from God and man. Mercy is its own reward. The merciful shall obtain mercy (Matt. v. 7). 3. *If they turn from sin, Divine blessings shall be given in rich abundance.* "And rain righteousness upon you." God will work righteousness within us, help us to lead a righteous and holy life, and be faithful in keeping his righteous promise. Blessings, like showers, shall be given, rich in abundance, and refreshing in their consequence. God will come in Christ as the Lord our righteousness, and grant us abundant mercy. "I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessings" (Ezek. xxxiv. 26).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Moral husbandry. 1. *Ploughing* in penitence or "iniquity." 2. *Sowing* "in righteousness" or sin. 3. *Reaping* "in mercy" or wickedness.

The activity of the wicked. They plough, sow, and harrow mischief to themselves and others. If they would work as hard for heaven as they do for hell they could not lightly miss it.

Seeking the Lord an immediate duty. I. Whom we are to seek. The Lord. This implies—1. That man is removed from God by sin. 2. That man may get near to God by seeking. 3. That it is his duty to do so. *II. How we are to seek the Lord.* 1. *By repentance.* (1) The heart broken *for* sin. (2) The heart broken *from* sin. Genuine repentance accompanied by reformation of life (Lu. xix. 8). 2. *By faith.* (1) In God (Heb. xi. 6). (2) In Christ (Acts xx. 21). *III. When we are to seek the Lord. Now!* "It is time." 1. To some of you these words contain a *reproof.* 2. For many of you these words contain a *warning.* (1) You will never have a *better* time. Facilities for seeking the Lord *decrease with delay.* (2) You may not have *another opportunity.* Many have waited for the "convenient season," and been visited with "sudden destruction." (3) To all these words contain a *welcome.* "It is *time*," *i. e.* not too late. You may have long put off, yet just in time—it may be *only just* [*The Study*].

The fruit of lies. Sin a lie in its promises, appearance, and results. It looks fair, excites desire, but is rotten,

deadly poison within. It lies, (1) as a fact, and (2) as a doctrine. "Ye shall not surely die." "Ye shall be as God," said the "father of lies" at first. Men have eaten the fruit of lies ever since, which has "brought death and all our woe into the world." 1. *Israel's* history the fruit of lies. They believed not God, rejected good and tasted bitter evil. 2. The *world's* history the fruit of lies. The race has eaten the results of sin and deception. 3. The *sinner's* history the fruit of lies. What is pleasure, gaiety, and the world but lies? Men are daily fed by lies. "Every sin is a lie," says Augustine. Its fruit will neither profit nor satisfy. It is not only empty but mischievous (Is. xliv. 20; lix. 4, 5).

Rain righteousness. The liberality of Divine gifts. Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, lit. a rain of liberalities (Ps. lxviii. 9). Goodness free and full provided for his people. 1. God the source until "*he* come." 2. Blessings plenteous "rain." 3. The Church revived. Or, I. God's mercy compared to a shower. 1. Direct from above, not through human mediums. 2. Given in freeness. 3. No substitute for it. II. This mercy is promised (1) To those who repent and return to him. (2) To those who pray and long for it. III. This shower of mercy is wanted now, to convert the sinner and confirm the Church. Seek it in time and we shall not fail.

HOMILETICS.

THE EVIL OF EVILS.—*Verses* 14, 15.

Therefore, such the fruit of departing from God, and trusting in idols and mighty men. Tumults from within would prepare the nation for invasion without. The king would be cut off and the kingdom destroyed by a sudden stroke. Idolatry and the corruption of pure religion will bring judgment upon the Church. Sin is the evil of evils, the source of all sorrows.

I. It creates national wars. Nations get angry and disagree. High attitudes and great tones are assumed, and war must support the dignity and maintain the interests of the throne. Insults to flags and ambassadors, petty offences to rulers, the policy of cabinets and the intrigue of courts, have been motives to war. 1. *We have aggressive war.* Nations are not satisfied with their natural boundaries; for gain and self-aggrandizement they must invade the territories of others. Ambition, passion for empire and glory, desire for vengeance and plunder, lead them to unjust and unnatural aggression. 2. *We have civil war.* "Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people." Nations, one in language and interests, are divided by enmity and tumult. In Israel there was no central principle, no oneness nor stability. Confused noise and war sprang from the midst of their own ranks (Am. ii. 2). There were *peoples*, not, as God willed them to be, *one*, but many. Foreign wars are dreadful enough, but civil wars are fratricidal and abominably wicked. France, England, and America have been rent asunder by civil discord, and bled to the core through the evil of evils. **II. It creates social revolutions.** 1. *Kings are dethroned.* "The king of Israel shall utterly be cut off." Israel, like the dislocated state of Rome under the first emperors, was distracted by anarchy and usurpation. There was no legitimate succession of kings or priests, for they made both, *but not through God.* "Each successor had the same right as his predecessor, the right of might, and furnished an example and precedent and sanction to the murder of himself or of his son." Monarchs are exalted and dethroned by political factions and civil broils. They rise suddenly from the ranks, crown themselves with honour, and are "cut off" in their projects. Sin creates wars which mingle royal blood with common gore, and starts revolutions which sweep monarchies and republics to destruction, like chaff before the storm. 2. *Subjects are enslaved.* Obedience to arbitrary power begets servility and slavery. Subsidies have been given for the loan or purchase of armies. Men have been hired to slaughter their fellow-men! The people have been reduced to bondage, intellectual, political, and moral degrad

ation. Taxes, laws, and princes have fettered their freedom. Immorality and crime have undermined the health, and polluted the character of the people. The rule of the oppressor "is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food" in fertile districts (Prov. xxviii. 3). **III. It leads to cruel deeds.** In the wickedness of Israel there was an essence of wickedness, malice within malice. This brought—1. *The devastation of land.* The day of battle spoiled all the fortresses of Israel. Their strongholds were taken by the enemy, and their fair cities levelled to the ground. Their land was swept by foreign invasion and domestic strife, filled with violence, and "wasting and destruction within their borders" (Is. lx. 18). 2. *The murder of its inhabitants.* With inhuman cruelty "the mother was dashed to pieces upon her children." Neither sex nor age are spared by barbarity. Men like Herod have been ferocious as brutes. Nations ancient and modern have stained their names with crimes dark as hell. "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." Such are some of the ravages produced by sin. Wars which ravaged fields and sacked cities; kings dethroned and palaces plundered; people enslaved and virtue violated; families murdered and hearts broken in agony and despair; crimes arresting the pursuits of commerce and arts, extinguishing the lights of science and religion, and filling kingdoms with pestilence and murder. These and a thousand other evils spring directly or indirectly from the evil of all evils. "That sin might appear exceeding sinful."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER X.

Ver. 1. *Fruit for self.* Selfishness is the universal form of human depravity. Every sin that can be named is only a modification of it. What is avarice, but selfishness grasping, and hoarding? What is prodigality, but selfishness decorating and indulging itself—a man sacrificing to *himself* as his own God? And what is idolatry, but that God enshrined man, worshipping the reflection of his own image [*Harris*]?

Ver. 2. *Divided heart.* In matters of great concern and which must be done there is no surer argument of a weak mind than irresolution; to be determined where the case is so plain and the necessity so urgent. To be always intending to lead a new life, but never to find time to set about it, this is as if a man should put off eating and drinking and sleeping from one day and night to another, till he is starved and destroyed [*Tillotson*].

Ver. 4. *Truthful.* Above all things speak the truth in words and actions. Let your word be your bond. Every violation of truth is moral suicide in the liar and a stab at the health of human society. "Truth," says Jeremy Collier "is the bond of union and the basis of human happiness. Without this virtue there is no reliance on language, no confidence in friendship, no security in promises and oaths."

Ver. 5—7. "*Earthly glory* is a mere shadow which eludes our effort, or, if caught, shrinks to nothing in the grasp." It is transitory, a garland which withers on the brow. "Is this all?" cried Cæsar in the midst of all his glory.

> Glory is like a circle in the water,
> Which never ceases to enlarge itself,
> Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought.

Ver. 8. *Impatient of life.* A lady once said to Fred. Robertson: "I thought you of all people were like St. Paul, and that you would wish for a heavenlier life as much as he did." He replied in words as true of others as of himself: "First of all, you thought wrong; next, if I do wish to die, it is when I am in pain, or out of conceit with life, which happens pretty often, but which I do not consider spirituality. It is only an ungracious way of saying, 'I am dissatisfied with what Thou hast given me, and do not like the duties that are mine at all. I am in pain, and want to be out of pain;' and I suppose a

great many people could say the same piece of sublime discontent" [*Silver*].

Ver. 9, 10. *Example.* For good or evil we act and influence men on earth. This influence will survive and affect others when we are gone. "Oh that my influence could be gathered up and buried with me," cried a dying man. Men imitate and follow our example, and a bad example, a life of sin, are most pernicious to posterity. "I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably" [*Shakespeare*].

Ver. 11. *Duty and delight.* Those who give to God only the shadow of duty can never expect from him a real reward [*Flavel*]. Employment is the salt of life. As salt gives *relish* to food, so employment prevents insipid and unwholesome feelings, and gives pleasure to life. Life is a delight just in the degree that it is consecrated to action.

> Life is *duty*—noblest therefore
> He who best that course selects;
> Never waiting, asking "wherefore?"
> Acting as his heart directs.

Ver. 12, 13. *Time.* A dying nobleman in a letter to a profligate companion confessed, "I never awaked till now. I have pursued shadows, and entertained myself with dreams. I have been treasuring up dust and sporting myself with the wind. I look back upon my past life, and, but for memorials of infamy and guilt, it is all a blank, a perfect vacancy. Oh, my friend, with what horror I recall those hours of vanity we have wasted together. Let me dwell with hermits, let me rest on the cold earth, may I but once more stand a candidate for an immortal crown, and have my probation for celestial happiness."

> Then time turns torment, when man turns a fool.
> [*Young.*]

Ver. 14, 15. *The evil of sin.* It debases body, mind, and soul, robs of domestic peace and enjoyment, and spreads contagion all around. It is rebellion against God and injurious to man. Once all the evil in the world was comprehended in one sinful thought, but now its results are a horrid progeny of evils. *Ambition.* If kings would only determine not to extend their dominions until they had filled them with happiness, they would find the smallest territories too large, and the longest life too short, for the full accomplishment of so grand and noble an ambition [*Colton*].

CHAPTER XI.

CRITICAL NOTES. 1.] The prophet shows how Israel had repaid God's love in the past with ingratitude and unfaithfulness. Child] "First-born son" (Ex. iv. 22), the infancy in Egypt and the wilderness; son by election. Called] Brought safely out, typical of Christ's call (Matt. ii. 15), and of redemption through him. 2. They] Moses, Aaron, and prophets; many calls, but Israel drew back from them, went after gods. 3. I taught] Lit. set Ephraim on his feet (cf. Deut. i. 31; viii. 2, 5; Neh. ix. 21; Is. lxiii. 9). God supported them as a nurse her child, gently taught them to walk, and carried them when tired (Num. xi. 12. See Acts xiii. 18, *marg.*). Knew] Ignored God's kindness, perceived not God's design to restore them (Ex. xv. 26). 4. Cords of a man] Par. to "bands of love." "cords with which men are led, more especially children that are weak upon their feet, in contrast with ropes, with which men control wild, unmanageable beasts (Ps. xxxii. 9), are a figurative representation of the paternal humane guidance of Israel" [*Keil*]. Take off] Heb. lift up, *i. e.* push the yoke higher up, to relieve oxen, that they might eat with comfort and ease. Pusey gives, "I was regarded by them as putting the yoke on, ever placing some new yoke or constraint upon them," but the words indicate God's continued goodness. Laid meat] Gave means of grace and manifestations of mercy in abundance; manna in the desert. 5. Shall not] An apparent contradiction to viii. 13, ix. 3; but Egypt there is a type of bondage, here the hope of relief against Assyria. They would no longer go to Egypt for help, but be taken captive to Assyria. 6. Abide] Lit. to whirl round, turn in a circle, indicating the violence and extent of punishment, often the sense of falling and staying until the mission is fulfilled (Jer. xxiii. 19; xxx. 23; Lam. iv. 6, 2 Sam. iii. 29). Branches] Some, villages which are branches, dependencies upon cities; mighty

men, others. **Baddim**] Sig. poles (Ex. xxv 13), made of branches, firmness derived from being woven together; bars or bolts by which gates were fastened together (Job xvii. 16). **7. Bent**] Lit. hung suspended on backsliding, "impaled or fastened upon apostasy as upon a stake, so that it cannot get loose" [*Keil*]. **None**] Lit. together they exalted not, they were all bent downwards, and did not rise, lift themselves upwards to exalt and love God. **8. Ad.** and **Zeb.**] Two cities destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut. xxix. 23). **Turned**] Heb. upon me (1 Sam. xxv. 36; Jer. viii. 18). **Repentings**] My strong compassions are excited, glow with love and heat. Joseph's bowels (were hot), did yearn (Gen. xliii. 30; Lu. xxiv. 32; 1 Kings iii. 26). In all three places the same word found. **9. Execute**] As fierce conquerors often do; after destroying cities, he will abate his anger and show mercy. **For I am God**] I do not change my purpose like man (1 Sam. xv. 29; Num. xxiii. 19; Mal. iii. 6). The holy, the pure and perfect one, and known to be such in the midst of thee. **10. They**] A remnant should walk after the Lord. **Roar**] in judgments on the foe (Is. xxxi. 4; Jer. xxv. 26—30). **Tremble**] Hasten, like birds in rapid flight from western parts called *the sea* (Is. xi. 11; xxiv. 14; Zech. viii. 7). **11. As a dove**] Ch. vii. 11; Is. lx. 8. **Houses**] from whence they will not be driven again (Ezek. xxviii. 26). The idea is this:—when God shall call, like the roaring of a lion, in loud and far-reaching tones, Israel will hear, return, walk with God, and remain faithful to him. **12. Ephraim**] is charged with lying and deceit again. **Jud. ruleth**] not without God, as Ephraim, but by a legitimate succession of kings and priests, and was outwardly faithful by maintaining the worship of God. **Saints**] The priests and Levites, fathers and prophets, who kept the worship of God pure and holy: others, with God, the Most Holy One. God will never be without witnesses in the direst age and the darkest nation

HOMILETICS.

God's Paternal Care and Man's Ungrateful Return.—*Verses* 1—4.

There is a wonderful cluster of blessings in these verses, every one of which is significant, and the whole especially puts men under deep obligation.

I. God's great kindness. God loved, trained, and treated his people with the greatest care, though they sinned and rebelled against him. This kindness is displayed—1. *In the love of a parent towards a son.* "When Israel was a child then I loved him." (*a*) *This love is free.* God loved them not because they were better and more numerous than others. He loved them of his own free will, and chose them because he loved them (Deut. vii. 7, 8). (*b*) *This love is undeserved.* "When a child," wayward and self-willed, foolish and disobedient. We love children because they are like us, or because they please us. But God loves men that are unlike him in character and helpless in condition (Rom. v. 6). This love is sovereign and undeserved; "for we were by nature children of wrath, even as others." When forlorn and outcast, God loves men and adopts them into his family. 2. *In the power of a redeemer to a captive.* "And called my son out of Egypt." God not only *called* by the voice of his servants, but gave power to obey the call. Men are called for years, but do not, are unwilling and unable to come to God. The Spirit makes us willing in the day of God's power; reluctance is overcome; we rise and obey the call. Power in a redeemer is a necessity. We cannot trust a Saviour who cannot deliver us. But in Christ omnipotence is linked with love, power is employed for the ends of mercy and the salvation of man. Redemption from Egypt is a type of deliverance from sin, death, and hell. "For he shall save his people from their sins." 3. *In the tenderness of a nurse for a child.* "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms." Like a mother or nurse, training a child in leading-strings, God carries men when young, upholds them when weak, and teaches them gradually and gently to walk in his commands. He takes them by their arms, lifts them up from dust and despair, and teaches them "to go" in pursuit of better things. It is the privilege of God's people not only to be loved and delivered, but taught and guided. When weak and weary, in paths rough and dark, God is with them, leading them about, and instructing them and keeping them as the apple of his eye (Deut. xxxii. 10). "In the wilderness where thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place" (Deut. i. 31; Acts xiii. 18). 4. *In the skill of a physician towards the sick* "I healed them." God's people are not only cared for, but cured in sickness and sorrow. Sin is self-injury, but

God is our happiness and health. Men inflict wounds upon heart and mind, destroy themselves, but in God is their help (Hos. xiii. 9). God cures their sicknesses and pardons their sins, aids their infirmities and heals their diseases (Ps. ciii. 3). No other physician can close our wounds and putrefying sores, no earthly ointment can mollify our bruises. "I am the Lord that healeth thee." 5. *In the kindness of a master towards his servants.* 1. *Kindness in drawing men into his service.* They are alienated and distant from God, naturally ill-disposed and unable to come to him. All who come are drawn, "Draw me and I will run after thee." Compulsory piety tends to infidelity. Lord Bolingbroke was compelled to peruse volumes of controversial Divinity when far too young to understand them. This perhaps implanted in his mind seeds of aversion to the truths of the Bible. (*a*) This drawing is by *love*, "with bands of love." Love only can draw, cruelty drives. God uses no violence nor force, never tries harsh when gentle means will do. The law affects us like frost the stream; it hardens and stagnates the soul: but the love of God, like the shining sun and the gentle shower, melts the cold and breaks the heart into gushing streams. Teachers who rule with a rod, and parents who govern with a frown, will not win affection and obedience. God draws by loving-kindness, and wins to his service by love. "I treat my enemies so well that I compel them to be my friends," said Alexander the Great. "No cord or cable," says Burton, "can draw so forcibly, or bind so fast, as love can do with only a silken thread." (*b*) This drawing is in *harmony with our moral nature.* "With cords of a man." Men are not used like dumb driven cattle, but treated as responsible and rational creatures. In the promises of the gospel, the work of the Spirit, and the character of Christ, we are looked upon as *men*, and not machines nor brutes. All God's dealings are in harmony with our mental and moral constitution. "The love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor. v. 14; 1 John iv. 19). 2. *Kindness in refreshing men in his service.* (*a*) *God relieves in distress.* "I was to them as they that take off the yoke." Like a merciful man who regardeth the life of his beast, he eased them of their burdens, and helped them in distress. Christ delivers from the yoke of bondage, and from the hands of our enemies (Lev. xxvi. 13). (*b*) *God provides in want.* "And I laid meat unto them." Manna from heaven, water from the rock, and "food convenient for them," were provided for his ancient people. In Christ there is no starvation nor stint. Blessings in abundance are given through him. Pardon, peace, and joy; relief from harassing care, and rest in perfect security. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." **II. Man's ungrateful return.** God has put men under deep obligations by his goodness. If the kind deeds of men bind us to think of them and love them, how much do we owe to God, to whose ceaseless bounty we owe every comfort of life? What he bestows upon us in kindness and constant care should be given back in sacrifice, incense, and devotion. "How unsuitable it is," says Edwards, "for us who live only by kindness to be unkind."

> I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
> With coldness still returning;
> Alas! the gratitude of men
> Hath oftener left me mourning.

1. *They reject Divine teaching.* "As they called them, so they went from them." Moses and Aaron, prophets and apostles, were unheeded. The more they were admonished the more careless they grew; the more pressing the teacher the more refractory the taught. Foolishness is bound in the hearts of children. When they are taught to go, they go from God into ways of sin. Divine instruction is needful and constantly given, yet many turn away in contempt. Christ is preached and the gospel offered, but men go to their merchandise and their farms. "Lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in them?" 2. *They despise Divine favours.* "They knew not that I healed them." They look to men as the source of blessings, as though by their own power and goodness they procure them.

Ourselves and others are thanked, and God forgotten. We do not see the end of Divine chastisement, nor acknowledge Divine goodness in our prosperity. God is constantly ignored, and wilful ignorance leads to base ingratitude. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." 3. *They cling to their wicked course.* "They sacrificed unto Baalam," went from one god to another, "and burned incense to graven images." When men forsake the true God, they cut, and grave, and adore idols of their own. This is self-abasement and self-destruction; a just ground of complaint with God, and a sad perversion in man. "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me."

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. The chap. begins with *love;* ancient, sovereign, electing love. The next sweet word is *sonship.* We see immediately after in the same verse, *calling, salvation, deliverance.* "I called my son out of Egypt" [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 1, 3 & 4. God's children young to be cared for; weak to be strengthened; ignorant to be taught; needy to be fed; tired to be refreshed.

Holding up. 1. To teach dependence. 2. To sustain the steps. 3. To regulate the walk. God keeps from falling, lifts up when down, gently, kindly, and gradually leads along in the path of virtue. What love and care! Be not afraid to trust in God, he may chide, but will never forsake you. He keepeth the feet of his saints (1 Sam. ii. 9). He guideth their feet in the way of peace (Lu. i. 79).

Ver. 4. Christian life *a drawing* from sin and the world to God, greater faith and attainments, to more intimate fellowship on earth, and heaven at length. "He did not say lead, but *draw* him. This violence is done to the heart, not to the body. Why marvel? Believe, and thou comest; love, and thou art drawn. Think it not a rough and uneasy violence: it is sweet, alluring; the sweetness draws thee" [*Augustine*]. "All the methods and parts of God's government are twined together as twisted cords of love from God, so ordered that they ought to draw man with all his heart to love him again."

God's love in his word and in his providence lays us under strong obligation to duty. How thankful should we be that all things are prepared and provided for us day after day. But how aggravating that guilt which despises such love. "To sin against mercy is to sin against humanity; and as no surfeit is more dangerous than that of bread, so no judgment is more terrible than that which grows out of love felt and slighted" [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

The Short-sighted Policy of Sinners.—*Verses* 5, 6.

Israel were rebelling against Assyria, and looking to Egypt for help. They had forsaken God and desired to escape his judgments. But they should have what they did not wish, and be deprived of what they sought to have. There was no refuge nor retiring place; Assyria would take them captive, and the sword would perpetually rest on their cities and people. This punishment would be the result of their own short-sighted policy.

I. In refusing Divine and following their own counsels. "They refused to return" to God and his ways, and were defeated by adopting their own plans. God's counsel is continually given to guide and correct us, and to reject this counsel is folly in the extreme. 1. *It is the only safe counsel.* Human guides may err. The wisest only guess. We require certainty and security. Many stumble, but in

God "shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble." 2. *It is the only firm counsel.* Man's instructions change, and his purpose can be frustrated. He may adjust circumstances and take precautions, yet not escape. God has knowledge to foresee and power to overcome opposition. "The counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." 3. *It is the only rational counsel.* It is the only probable way to succeed according to our desire. The wisdom of the fool is conceit and self-delusion. He wanders into danger, and wrongs his own soul. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes; but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." **II. In bringing destruction upon them when they expected safety.** They were trusting to Egypt, and depending upon their mighty men and fortified cities, but the sword would devour them. 1. *The destruction was violent.* The sword fell, whirled down upon them in all its weight, like "a whirlwind of the Lord gone forth in fury, a grievous whirlwind which fell grievously upon the head of the wicked" (Jer. xxiii. 19). 2. *The destruction was extensive.* It "shall abide on his cities and shall consume his branches, and devour them" like flames of fire. Whether branches mean mighty men, villages, or bars of the cities, it is all one. Power could not defend the mighty, and defenced places were levelled to the ground. Princes and people, storehouses of wealth and palaces of splendour, fall through the sins of the nation. 3. *The destruction was lasting.* The sword abode upon them as long as they continued their rebellion against God. Israel's kings were inaugurated by blood, and by God's appointment they should reap just retribution. "Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thy house." **III. In rushing into the bondage from which they seek to escape.** They sought to avoid Assyria by flying to Egypt, but this was the very means to bring them into bondage. We cannot escape God's presence, nor shun the consequences of broken law. What appears the nearest refuge is often the remotest hope and the swiftest punishment. Persons to whom we fly for help are often the weakest to defend, and rushing from one danger the surest way to fall into another. Men fall by their own counsel and are taken in their own craftiness. They mistake if they think to avoid the judgments of God by cunning artifice and deceit, to promote their true interests by refusing to follow Divine counsel (Job v. 13; xviii. 7). "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee."

Bent on Backsliding.—*Verse 7.*

In all men there is a tendency to sin. The principle of evil is within us. But sad must it be for the Christian Church, for those who profess to own God, to refuse allegiance to him, and dethrone him in their hearts. How grieving to God for his own chosen people to backslide from him, and to be *bent*, given up entirely, to this fixed course of aversion from God.

I. They were constant in backsliding. Prophets and teachers continually "called them," but they did not forsake their ways. God calls men by his word and by his servants, but they turn away from him. They may halt betimes, veer round in a circle of duties, but their continual thoughts and daily life are departure from God. **II. They were unanimous in backsliding.** "None at all would exalt him," all together they apostatized. They refused as one man to return. Evil majorities and idolatrous customs influence in the wrong direction. The lower learn from the higher classes, and the country's creed becomes the prevalent practice. When all ranks patronize evils, they are established by general consent. Those who corrupt the faith or taint the morals of the community may commit an injury or spread a disease which will ruin generations to come. **III. They were obstinate in backsliding.** "They would not." They were obstinate as an ox, which refused to be driven out of the wrong into the right path. When the will is bent in sin, the current of life follows, overturning all obstacles and defying all counsels. "Ever weaker" the will "grows through acted crime," until men get stubborn and insens-

ible, unable and unwilling to repent. "Ye *will* not come." Well might Edward VI. pray, "Order my living, so that I may do that which thou requirest of me, and give me grace that I may know it, and have will and power to do it." **IV. They were fixed in backsliding.** By continual practice it had become a settled habit. Their whole life was centred and fastened in this course. They were fixed and immoveable in adherence to their sins. The sinner may habituate himself to evil until he is impaled on it, unable to resist and overcome it. It may so absolutely possess a man that he cannot break its dominion, nor free himself from its power. The condition of men is the consequence of life, and the cords of sin the result of evil habits. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be *holden* with the cords of his sins."

Divine Justice and Divine Mercy in apparent Conflict for the Sinner.—*Verses* 8, 9.

This passage is one of the most mysterious and interesting in the Bible. There actually seems a struggle between one attribute and another. Justice and mercy are in conflict; righteousness and peace kiss each other for the good of the sinner. God is represented after the manner of men, as kindling in compassion, yearning to bless, while anxious to show justice; and at length, though punishing in measure, determining to mitigate the sentence. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?"

I. Justice is deserved. They deserved to be treated like Admah and the other cities of the plain. 1. *They had forgotten God.* Favoured with sensible manifestations and unspeakable privileges, they ignored his presence and disregarded his works. The memory of God's mercies is soon effaced, written in water, not on marble, and one generation after another needs renewal of the blessings. "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number." 2. *They had ill requited God.* They repaid with the mouth, not with the heart. There was no depth in their penitence, nor firmness in their conduct, "for their heart was not right with him." They changed from reverence to apostasy, from fair profession to base ingratitude. The favours of men touch us, but the love of God kindles no fire upon the altar within. Love free, abundant, and precious is the only friendship for which men make no returns. This seems a miracle, a monster of stupidity, if we argued against experience. "Annihilate not the mercies of God by the oblivion of ingratitude." **II. Mercy prompts to save.** Mercy exists with justice in the purpose, and one attribute does not destroy another in the work of God. 1. *God is merciful.* If God were just, and dealt with us after our sins, mercy would be unknown. Justice might sweep the earth, or rear its monuments of vengeance.

> When we slip a little
> Out of the way of virtue, are we lost?
> Is there no medicine called sweet mercy?

Yes, God is more compassionate than a tender father. "*My heart is turned within me,*" with deep compassion. Give up? No, how can I do *that?* I delight in mercy. "*My repentings are kindled together,*" I have punished enough. "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." 2. *God's mercy shall be seen.* "I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger." Mercy prevails over the rigour of justice. God will not "destroy Ephraim," as soldiers that return a second time to pillage a city they have wasted. God's mercy is seen—(*a*) *In Christ,* who came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. (*b*) *In Christian experience,* in the forgiveness of sin, the bestowment of grace, and the gift of glory. Mercy now is proclaimed to all. God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth.

"For I will not contend for ever with my people, neither will I be always wroth: for the human spirit would fail, be crushed before me" (Is. lvii. 16). **III. God determines to exercise mercy and not justice.** "I will not execute," &c. The reasons for this choice are given. 1. *God is unchangeable in his covenant mercy.* "For I am God, and not man." Man is fitful and swayed by human passion. "Man punishes, to destroy; God smites, to amend," says Jerome. Men are angry, vindictive, and cruel one to another; implacable, unmerciful (Rom. i. 31); but God is compassionate and forgiving. Men are mutable, the truest friends are uncertain; but God is not man. "I am Jehovah, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." 2. *God is revealed among men to be a God of mercy.* "The Holy One in the midst of thee." Hence his procedure does not contradict his known character. God is holy and just, true and faithful, and that might be considered a reason for rejecting a rebellious people. But how can this happen? How can justice be reconciled with mercy, and the providence proclaim the love of God? The difficulty is solved in Jesus Christ. In him God is "faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." His holiness is the defence of his people, and an argument for a consecrated life. In a corrupt Church and a degenerate age let us "give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Mercy interposeth her four several "hows" (in the original only two, but the other two necessarily understood, and by interpreters fitly supplied) for such pathetical interrogations as the like are not to be found in the whole book of God, and not to be answered by any but God himself; as he doth to each particular in the following words: "My heart is turned within me," that is the first answer; the second, "My repentings are kindled together;" the third, "I will not execute the fierceness of my wrath;" the fourth, "I will not return to destroy Ephraim." And why? First, "I am God and not man;" secondly, the "Holy One in the midst of thee" [*Trapp*].

God's mercy—1. Springs from himself. "Repentings kindled together." 2. Contrasted with men's conduct. "I am God and not man." 3. Overcoming God's justice. "I will not execute." 4. Supplying man's need. "Greater is the mercy of God than the misery of all men," says Augustine.

I am God, &c. God unchangeable. 1. An encouragement to the penitent. 2. A warning to the sinner. As God is in mercy, so in power. Let all be thankful that while man's pity is soon exhausted God's pity is great, and displayed to those who carefully seek it with tears.

HOMILETICS.

The Penitent's Return to God.—*Verses* 10, 11.

God will pity his people once more. They shall hasten to him in fear and trembling, be recalled from exile and bondage, and restored to their inheritance and their God.

I. **It is a return from great distance.** Man wilfully departed from God, lives now without desire to return, and is alienated from God in life and affection. Distance from God is the moral condition, the natural law, and the penal consequence of sin. "Why standest thou afar off, O Lord?" II. **It is a return in deep penitence.** "They shall tremble as a bird." The contrite heart trembles in fear. The sinner almost despairs in remembrance of his desert, and the holiness of God; or if moved by fear, he is conscious of guilt, greatly mourns his sin, and returns to confess to God and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." III. **It is a return in swift obedience.** "As a dove out of the land of Assyria," remarkable

for its swift flight, its rapid and constant speed when flying to its cot. The sinner makes haste from his danger to his rest. There is no time, no reason for delay. God draws, and he runs. Like the prodigal, he resolves and executes. "I will arise and go." No sooner said than done. Like the manslayer of old, he has "*fled* for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." **IV. It is a return through severe discipline.** The inward experiences and the outward conditions of the penitent have been most bitter and distressing. But many have been brought through severe trials and strange providences to God. Pain and sufferings have punished them for their sins. God has not only roared, but torn them to the astonishment of others. The call has been loud and the impressions deep. In fear and trembling, they have returned to "the lion of the tribe of Judah." **V. It is a return to intimate friendship with God.** "They shall walk after the Lord." Walking with God includes *friendship* with God; for how can two walk together except there be agreement between them? It includes obedience, love, and constant activity in God's service. Some turn away and flee from God. They are not near in thought nor deed. But the humbled penitents wish to please God and walk with him. They desire the abiding presence, and seek to dwell in "the everlasting habitations" of God. They follow after him with intense thirst and determined pursuit. The will, the word, and the character of God are their constant rule and delight. Many nations shall say, We will walk in his paths (Mic. iv. 2).

Israel's Return to God Predicted.

God would not destroy all Israel, a remnant should be preserved and walk after him. Hence many take the words as a prediction of the future restoration and return of God's people.

I. They shall be gathered from distant places. "From the west," "out of Egypt," and "out of the land of Assyria." No distance destroys God's love, no bondage limits his power, and no enemy can keep his people when he calls them to himself. Many shall come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God (Matt. viii. 11). **II. They shall be joined together in great numbers.** "As a dove out of the land of Egypt." Doves not only fly swiftly, but flock together. The sympathy of numbers is great in every undertaking, but especially in the service of God, where that sympathy is purified and rightly directed. "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows" (Is. lx. 8)? are words which describe the future converts to God. **III. They shall be restored to great privileges.** 1. *Fellowship with God.* "They shall walk after the Lord." They would be many days without leaders and sacrifices, but afterward should return and seek the Lord God and David their king (ch. iii. 4, 5). They would live in loyal obedience to Jehovah, their lawful sovereign, and walk with him in sweet friendship and joy. 2. *Security in their own habitations.* "I will place them in their houses." They would dwell securely, not in defenced cities, but in their homes, under their own vines and fig-trees (Mic. iv. 4). Man, like a bird, needs a shelter. Security and peace are only found in God. He can *place* them in Christ, in the Christian Church, and in his eternal kingdom. "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . I go to prepare a place for you."

The True and the False Worshipper.—*Verse* 12.

The prophet makes another charge against Israel. Lying and deceit are applied to their idolatrous worship and hypocritical pretences. Ephraim compassed, surrounded God with lies; but Judah maintained the worship of God, and walked after the example of godly priests and forefathers. The words distinguish the true from the false worshipper.

I. The false worshipper. He draws near to God with his people, and honours God with the lip, but his worship is all pretence and hypocrisy. 1. *He lies to God in worship.* Israel lied in setting up and honouring the golden calves. All their

prayers, repentance, and sacrifices were lies. When the heart is not right with God, when worship is mere formality and custom, then all prayers, offerings, and professions are lies and deceit. All half-heartedness and unbelief, all counterfeits in religion, are falsehoods to besiege God and deceive men. 2. *He lies to God in daily life.* He surrounds God in manifold, not isolated acts. Lying is a general custom with him. He keeps up religious forms and assumptions, lives a moral life outwardly, and "fills up some radical defect with some shallow pretence." But he professes and does not practise; has the form without the power of godliness; and "seems a saint, when most he plays the devil." All his life is a disguise. He is darkness disguised in garments of light; the devil's servant dressed in Christ's livery; falsehood practised "under saintly show." Thus men worship God in lies, transact business and deceive their fellow-men with fair promises and pretences.

O hypocrite, thy boldness strikes at heaven,
And makes its fervid saints appear impostors.

II. The true worshipper. 1. *He is acceptable to God.* God looks for attachment and fidelity in his people. He is their true and rightful Lord, and will bless all who honour him. Some are accused by conscience, and condemned by God for deceit and hypocrisy; others are commended and blessed in their approaches to him. Their prayers are heard, their gifts accepted, and their sacrifices are well-pleasing to God. 2. *He walks in the steps of good men.* Judah was "faithful with the saints." If we take the margin, he was faithful with God, the Holy One; far from false and fraudulent dealings by which Ephraim circumvented God. Or take saints as describing the priests and Levites, the fathers and prophets, who handed down and defended the pure worship of God. They did not set at nought, but followed good examples. We should be loyal to the kings and faithful to the priests whom God has appointed to rule over us. We should hold to the principles and walk in the steps of God's people, the good old way in which our forefathers walked before us. "Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." 3. *He is dignified by ruling with God.* "Judah yet ruleth with God." Obedience to God's people is co-operation with God's work. Ephraim sought to rule without God, and cast off the worship of God. But to submit to God is to conquer; to serve God is to reign over sin and the world, the flesh and the devil. In persevering prayer we have power with God; in holy, consistent life we prevail with men; and in God's service we have true liberty, real dignity, and everlasting dominion. "The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XI.

Ver. 1, 4. *Drew them.* No being ever yet drew another to him by a display of authority and terror. God himself never drew one soul to him by the law, which is only a system of authority and terror; but by the gospel, which is his scheme of mercy and grace. The whole of Christianity may be considered an infinite expediency, devised by the only wise God, to dispossess our minds of bad and unworthy thoughts, to fix in our trembling bosoms confidence, and thus to cause us to return to him. When we wish to influence a man we reason with him, inform his mind—we argue and persuade. This is precisely the method in which God deals with us. "He works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure" [*Jay*].

Who overcomes
By force, hath overcome but half his foe.
[*Milton*].

Ver. 5, 6. *Shall consume.* Guilt and punishment are bound together. One should act as a warning to the other. The threat of punishment is a merciful declaration to some, though a terror to others. If there are rocks and shoals in the ocean of life, it is not cruelty to chart them down; it is an eminent and great mercy [*Beecher*].

Ver. 7. *Backsliding.* It is not one

of the least miseries of a backsliding state, that every state of departure from God disposes the soul to a greater degree of alienation. As it is said of a sheep, that having once wandered from the fold, it never thinks of returning, but "wanders on still more and more astray;" so it may be affirmed of the wanderer, that in most cases his backslidings are multiplied, until frequent disappointments and direct extremities force him to retrace his steps, or the strong hand of the Good Shepherd brings him back.

Ver. 8, 9. *The perfections of God* afford a refuge for the sinner. God is just. Nothing that he does can be unjust, arbitrary, or hard. But naked justice affords no comfort. It may fix the sword to keep the gate of Eden, send the surging sea over Sodom, Gomorrah, and Zeboim, and smite the shepherd and not the sheep with the sword, but it exacts full and perfect obedience to the law, and punishment for every sin. Where, then, can we look? Justice no longer appals when satisfied in Christ. It is the love, the mercy of God, which is our citadel. And God will never cease to be merciful to his Church. He is perpetually and gloriously displaying his mercy to men. To destroy them would frustrate the Divine plan and rob them of hope and consolation. The Eternal One is ever the same. No centuries, no sidereal cycles, measure him whose name is *I am that I am.* Our lives vanish every moment; not so with God. His *mercy* is everlasting—his mercy endureth for ever [*J. W. Alexander*].

Ver. 10, 11. *Repentance.*

At length corrected by the filial rod
Of his offended, but his gracious God,
And lashed from sins to sighs; and by degrees
From sighs to vows, from vows to bended knees;
From bended knees to a true pensive breast;
From thence to torments not to be expressed;
Returns, and (from his sinful self exiled)
Finds a glad Father, he a welcome child.
[*Quarles.*]

Ver. 12. *The hypocrite.*

His virtues being overdone, his face
Too grave, his prayers too long, his charities
Too pompously attended, and his speech
Larded too frequently, and out of time,
With serious phraseology—were rents
That in his garments opened in spite of him,
Through which the well-accustomed eye could see
The rottenness of his heart [*Pollok*].

CHAPTER XII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **1. Feed**] To eat or graze. **Wind**] What is empty and vain; to hun after nothing, labour in vain. **East**] A fierce and destructive wind, oppressive and violent (Job xxvii. 21); figurative of that destruction which sinners bring upon themselves. **Increaseth**] *i.e.* continually, multiplies lies and violence by their sins (ch. iv. 2), by which the kingdom is desolated. To this they add gifts, to win alliance with Assyria and Egypt, but all in vain. God will visit both kingdoms. **2. Jud.**] Whose guilt was not open apostasy. **Jacob**] The ten tribes or chief part of Israel. God will punish, will visit according to their deeds. The original indicates a purpose to visit. If God spares not the favoured, how shall the deserving escape? **3.**] Jacob was their forefather; they should imitate his good, not his bad qualities. They are descendants, but their ways contrast with his (Mic. ii. 7). He secured the birth-right and the blessing with it; wrestled with God and prevailed in prayer. He wrestled in the womb, and as an adult he wrestled with man and with God. **Took**] To hold the heel (Gen. xxv. 26). **Strength**] In his manly vigour he behaved himself princely with God (Gen. xxxii. 24—29), and acquired the name of *prince.* This strength given in conscious weakness. **4. Angel**] In human form God wrestled, put Jacob's thigh out of joint, but did not prevail. Jacob could no longer stand. **Wept**] and poured out intense desires in supplication, and though wounded, was not overcome in conflict, but found God and talked with him at Bethel. **There**] he speaks to us by Jacob, girt with his spirit and might we may prevail. **5. Lord**] A name which implies constancy, by which God is distinguished and ever remembered (Ex. iii. 15; Ps. cxxxv. 13). **6. Turn**] Lit. thou shalt turn, so turn as to enter into vital fellowship with God (Is. x. 22). **Thou**] who wishest to be a true descendant, pray and act as Jacob. **7. Merchant**] Marg. a Canaanite, a

heathen, unlike Israel, to whom Canaanites were a reproach (Ezek. xvi. 3). **Oppress]** Lit. deceive. Men whose trade is deceit, whose balances are unjust, cannot love mercy and do judgment. **8. Eph. said,** in a spirit of disregard to the prophets, and in self-justification, **"I am become rich,** God prospers me; this is a proof that he is not displeased, and that there is no iniquity in me." But these riches were not enjoyed on account of sin. Their attitude towards God and man was the very opposite of right. **9. I]** God meets their delusion by reminding them that he had been their guide, defence, and source of prosperity, from wandering in the wilderness, and to settlement in tents now. Others take this as a threat to reduce them to their ancient helpless condition. **10. By prophets]** who left no means untried, speaking in metaphors and methods adapted to rouse the attention (Num. xii. 6, 8; Joel ii. 28). **11. Vanity]** The question strengthens the affirmation. All was to no purpose. Warnings unheeded, altars as numerous as heaps of stones gathered out of the field, and scenes of solemn history were corrupted and ruined. **12. Jacob]** was a *fugitive* and a *servant*, in a low condition (Gen. xxx. 31; 1 Sam. xvii. 20); did not marry an idolatress: his honest poverty reproves your ungodly gains, and his faith in God your idolatry and unbelief. **13. Israel]** as represented in Jacob, the individual, and in the nation in Egypt, has been *preserved* (Num. xii. 6, 8; Deut. xviii. 15, 18), *kept* by God, as Israel *kept* his flock (Ps. lxxx. 1; Is. lxiii. 11). **14. Anger]** Lit. with bitterness, instead of gratitude and praise, hence punishment. **Blood]** Blood-guiltiness a grave crime (Lev. xx. 9). **Leave]** The opposite of taking away or forgiving. **Return]** Dishonour to God repayed to Eph. **His]** For God does not give up his rights, though men set aside his dominion.

HOMILETICS.

Feeding upon the Wind.—*Verse* 1.

God has still complaints to make against his people. They turn from him, seek satisfaction in idolatry and in creature confidence. This is to feed upon the wind and to chase after the east wind. A course most unprofitable and most injurious.

I. This conduct is most unprofitable. In every department of business men look for profit. "What shall I gain by this?" is an all-important question. In a course of sin, in seeking safety and felicity from the creature instead of the Creator, there is no gain whatever. 1. *It is labour without satisfaction.* The wind will not satisfy the hungry man. Pleasure and mirth, worldly honours and religious formalities, are empty husks. Men can only *feed* upon bread. Grass for cattle, straw for swine, but "food for man." Sensitive joys gratify the passions, intensify the eagerness and increase the speed with which men seek pleasure; but it is only spending money for that which is not bread, and labour for that which satisfieth not. 2. *It is labour in vain.* The sinner delights in vain things, and pursues, hunts after emptiness and vanity. He spends his strength for nought, bestows the gifts of body and mind upon those who cannot help him, and seeks to support himself in things worthless and unsubstantial. His appetite is strengthened, not satisfied; his capacities enlarged, not filled; "an aching void," a blank, is left behind which the world cannot fill. The wisest man took an inventory of pleasures and the best things in the world, and gives the sum total as "*vanity of vanities.*"

The world's all title-page, without contents.

II. This conduct is most injurious. It is not only feeding upon wind, but following after what is most pernicious, "*the east wind,*" the most destructive of all. 1. *It increases injury by increasing lies.* "He daily increaseth lies." Men lie in false speech, false dealing, and false worship. They lie to themselves and to others by declaring the sufficiency of human help, and making covenant with man in forgetfulness of God. All things which prop up the false notions and the false systems of men are lies and delusion. The house built upon this foundation will fall, and great will be the fall of it. 2. *It brings ruin instead of shelter.* He daily increaseth "*desolation.*" The Cretians were always liars, and must be rebuked sharply (Tit. i. 13). Multiplying lies will multiply sorrows and punishments. (*a*) *This ruin is certain.* "He that speaketh lies shall not *escape*" (Prov. xix. 5). Not escape by devices of his own, nor "covenant with the Assyrians." Egypt withheld its aid, and Assyria was turned against Ephraim—everything false is a broken reed, a rotten support. (*b*) *The ruin is great.* "He that speaketh lies shall *perish*" (Prov xix. 9). God is faithful and true; repeats denunciations against lies

and deceit, and warns all of their danger. "I will be a swift witness against false swearers, and them that fear not me, saith the Lord of Hosts." What folly, therefore, to expect from the world what it cannot give, what is not in it. What infatuation to be willing to be deceived with the very shadow of profit. In labour like this there is no happiness "under the sun." "I have no comfort," said one, "in all this, because I meet death in every walk." As a punishment for this perversity God says, "Behold, it is not of the Lord of Hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

1. Men are so naturally averse to God that they fly to any source for help. Israel sometimes went to Egypt and sometimes to Assyria; to one or both according to their need. 2. Human helps will be of no avail in the day of trouble. Israel's allies could not ward off the judgments of God. 3. Men who deal falsely with God will deal falsely with their fellow-men. If the covenant of God be despised, the contracts with man will not be treated with sanctity. A man's word will not always be his bond. 4. Men who forsake God will find their own ways expensive and ruinous. They get nothing whatever but "wind," and they bring upon themselves the tempestuous and stormy wind (Jonah and Job, xv. 2). Oil and labour are lost, solemn leagues and covenants are broken, and the more they increase lies the further they run from their own mercies. "An empty body meeting with tempests will have much ado to bear up. If Ephraim first feed upon the wind, and then fall under the east wind, it must needs go hard with him."

Ver. 2. *A controversy with Judah.* J. adhered to the house of David and priesthood of Aaron—did not publicly commit idolatry, and was not so guilty as Israel; yet God blamed them and would punish them. Professors may have true forms and sound creeds, but ungodly lives. Men may glory in titles and descent, as Israel gloried in Jacob—be commended for some things, and sadly guilty in others. But God is impartial, and will not spare any sins, but measure out judgment according to the degree and obstinacy of guilt. He admonishes Judah, and indicates his purpose to visit Israel "according to his doings." "The justice of God falls more severely on those who degenerate from a holy parent than on those who have no incitement to good from the piety of their home."

HOMILETICS.

Imitating the Examples of Progenitors.—*Verses* 3, 4.

The Jews boasted of their relation to Jacob, but did not walk in his steps. Their trusting in man was a contrast to his believing in God. The prophet reproves them for their apostasy, shows how justly they were accused, and urges them to imitate the virtues, not the faults of their ancestor. We must not live under the shadow, but walk after the example of good men.

I. In Jacob we have an example of anxiety for God's blessing. He was eager to secure the birthright and the blessing connected with it. 1. *In the womb,* "he took his brother by the heel" (Gen. xxv. 26). He was to have precedence over the first-born by nature, and there was unconscious striving for Divine favour in store for him. Early indications of piety are encouraging. Some are chosen from the womb, and preserved from sins of youth and riper age. Potential development of children demands reverence and care in parents and teachers. Luther's schoolmaster took off his hat and bowed to his scholars when he entered the school-room and thought of their destiny. The solemn possibilities of the future should stimulate parents to train up children in the fear of God and the love of truth. "Even a child is known by his doings." 2. *In after years* "he had power

with God." In the womb he seized the heel; in manhood he cherished the same spirit, and became a prince with God. One struggle was the beginning of the other. The possession of God's promise was the object of both. Having striven for it in secret, he secured it in public. What he sought in childhood he gained in manhood. Early impressions are the elementary tissue out of which mature life and conduct are developed and organized. In this instance "the child is father of the man." Strength with God and power among men are the result of prayer and providential discipline. Those who are filled with true ambition, who seek to be great by following the example and serving the God of their forefathers, shall have the precedency. But profane persons like Esau, worldly-minded in their desires, and leagued with sin in their pursuits, will forfeit their birthrights and blessings. "The elder shall serve the younger." **II. In Jacob we have an example of power with God.** "By his strength he had power with God." 1. *Power through prayer.* In great fear and distress, he was no match for the armed force of his angry brother. He could neither resist nor flee. He found succour and strength in God. He acted princely, was strong in faith, and prevailed over man. In prayer our own strength is increased, and more is given to us by God. We are strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man (Eph. iii. 16). The nature of this prayer is briefly described. (1) *Supplicating prayer.* He "made supplication unto him." Supplication is earnest, constant prayer, and often accompanied with crying (Ps. xxviii. 2; Jer. iii. 21). (2) *Wrestling prayer.* "There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." The word indicates a twisting of bodily limbs; intense energy and exertion to prevail. Jacob's prayer was a struggle with the angel, physically and spiritually, in faith and determination. (3) *Prevailing prayer.* "He had power over the angel and prevailed." He conquered, received a new name, "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men" (Gen. xxxii. 28). Luther on one occasion had wrestled hard with God, and came leaping out of his closet, shouting, "*Vicimus, vicimus.* We have conquered, we have conquered!" 2. *Power through human tears.* "He wept and made supplication." Vehement desires and earnest prayers often find vent in tears. Hence "to implore means to ask with tears," says one. His tears were not mere signs of weakness, but of strength; not the relief of nature, but the expression of spirit. Esau wept in anger and disappointment; Jacob in prayer and penitence. The tears of one were music to God; the cry of the other, complaint to men. He was a type of Christ, "who in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." 3. *Power through Divine aid.* Jacob's purpose was strong, and his natural power great; but power to prevail was the gift of God. His physical strength was impaired; but though thrown in the contest, he would not give up. "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." The blessing was all, the injured thigh was nothing to him. From night till break of day he wrestled with human tears and Divine energy. His spirit and perseverance put to shame his degenerate sons. It is folly boasting of ancestral glory without possessing ancestral virtues. Let us imitate the life and remember the prayers of our fathers. They were girt with the might of faith, and victorious over the Lord of hosts. "Out of weakness" they were "made strong," and "waxed valiant in fight" with evil. Their glory is not the glory of the warrior, but the splendour of princes with God. Their new name supersedes the old, as the sun exceeds the stars. "For by it the elders obtained a good report."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 3, 4. *The wonderful combat.* *I. The combatants.* Jacob a man, and the angel, "the angel of the covenant." *II. The object of the combat.* "Bless me." In the night of sorrow and in the weakness of nature "turn to him

that smiteth." The blessing of the Lord maketh rich. *III. The issue of the combat.* "Power over the angel and prevailed." Persevering, wrestling prayer will always prevail. "The father in wrestling with his child is willing enough for his child's comfort and encouragement to take a fall now and then; so it was between the angel and Jacob. In this blessed story, as in a crystal glass, we see the great power and prevalency of private prayer; it conquers the conqueror; it is so omnipotent, that it overcomes an omnipotent God" [*Brooks*]. Jacob was knighted on the field. He had two names, and both of them were gained by wrestling; the one by wrestling with his brother in the womb, the other by wrestling with the angel at Peniel. Jacob signifies a supplanter; Israel means a prince with God—and the reason of the new name was, that he had "power with God and with mén, and had prevailed" [*Jay*].

Ver. 4. *Bethel.* Revelations of God to men. 1. God reveals himself by his word. "He *spake*." 2. The revelations of one age are designed for the instruction of another. "Spake *with us*." Most important lessons from this place.

Bethel in Jacob's time and Bethel in Israel's time; or Bethel in its ruin and Bethel in its royalty.

HOMILETICS.

The Memorial Name.—*Verse* 5.

When Jacob felt the power of his antagonist he asked, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name." To those who neglect what is plain and useful, and pry into things which do not concern them, the revelation is withheld; but to the earnest petitioner God gives blessings and encouragement. Here the name is unfolded in significance and splendour.

I. The name in its absolute perfection. "The Lord." Jehovah, the true and living God, distinguished from idols, and deserving the homage of his creatures. 1. *Lord by creation.* Greater proprietary right over us than we have over one another. The Lord our Maker. 2. *Lord by redemption.* This is a greater claim than creation. He had only to speak to make us; he suffered, gave his Son, to redeem us. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." 3. *Lord by choice.* His people do not resist his claims, nor serve other gods. They willingly submit to him as their "Master and Lord." **II. The name in its universal relation.** "God of Hosts." Of all things visible and invisible, of angels and heavenly spirits, of all creation, "the host of heaven and earth" (Gen. ii. 1). This indicates —1. *Supreme government.* He has all power, directs and sustains all creatures, and rules all things by his own will. 2. *Supreme order.* "Order is heaven's first law." He keeps all things in subordination, and by him all things consist or stand together. 3. *Constant obedience.* He leads his people, his armies, organized and equipped, like Israel leaving Egypt. He reigns over them, enthroned in affection, and renders their service natural, pleasant, and delightful. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master" (Mal. i. 6). 4. *Continual triumph.* The hosts of the Lord are in a state of martial discipline, to contend for the cause and fight the battles of their captain. The cause of truth is a warfare. Christian life is "fighting the good fight of faith." The world is a foe to the believer, and sin is deadly opposed to holiness. But the Lord God of hosts has omnipotent power and infinite resources. He will rule until all enemies are put under his feet. **III. The name in its continual manifestation.** "The Lord is his memorial." The name Jehovah expresses his nature, and will ever be what it has been, a memorial to men. God is ever to be remembered in his merciful and unchanging attributes (Ex. iii. 15). We need no images nor unlawful helps to remind us of God. His works and ways declare his wisdom, truth, and love. He will be to us what he was to Jacob and Moses, and all his people the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. In

this name lies a fulness and sufficiency which the exigencies of life will reveal. How little have we known of it in prayer and practical life! Seek to know more, and get hope, strength, and success in Christian work. "Thy name, O Lord, endureth for ever, and thy memorial, O Lord, throughout all generations."

TRUE CONVERSION TO GOD.—*Verse* 6.

"*Therefore*" to this God, who rules heaven and earth, Israel had only to turn in truth, and they would find in him what Jacob found. God offers himself to his apostate people, and all may claim a covenant right in him if they sincerely return to him. This return or conversion to God is described.

I. Induced by the revelation of God's character. "Therefore," if God is good, and able to save, they need not seek help from any other source. 1. *Revelations in his word.* "Thy God." We may disown, but can never cast off, our relationship to God as dependent, guilty creatures. He claims us in our sin, and does not reject us when we return to him. He is a God of love, not revengeful and unmerciful. The revelations of his word are suited to quicken our hearts, to destroy our "enmity with God," and draw us to him in penitence and faith. We clothe God in attributes of vengeance and thunder. But a persuasion of personal love wrought in the soul will induce the sinner to return. "He hath loved me." This is "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus," and revealed only in him. 2. *Revelations of his mercy to others.* What God has done for others he can do for us. Paul obtained mercy for a pattern to others. Bunyan and Newton were sinners saved by grace. Men in every age and in every degree of guilt have been monuments of God's mercy, and living examples of the power of God's word. "To show in the ages to come the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us by Christ Jesus." **II. Evidenced by the practical duties of life.** When the sinner turns to God, he will bring forth fruits meet for repentance (Matt. iii. 8). His life will not be empty profession, but filled with fruits of righteousness to God and man. 1. *Duties to man.* The duties of the second table, the weightier matters of the law, must not be overlooked. For if we disregard man, whatever professions we make before God, our religion is vain. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (*a*) *Mercy.* Men are weak and miserable, and need sympathy and compassion. We must not treat them with cruelty and injustice. Mercy wins and "blesseth him that gives and him that takes." On one occasion the ministers of Alphonsus, king of Naples, complained that his lenity did not become a prince. "What, then," said he, "would you have lions and tigers reign over you? Know you not that cruelty is the attribute of wild beasts—*clemency* that of *man?*" "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (*b*) *Judgment.* Justice, by which we give to all men their due. It is opposed to dishonesty, fraud, and unfairness of any kind. "A just man," says Jeremy Taylor, "does justice to every man and to every thing; and then, if he be also wise, he knows there is a debt of mercy and compassion due to the infirmities of man's nature, and that is to be paid; and he that is cruel and ungentle to a sinning person, and does the worst to him, dies in his debt and is unjust." "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, for this is the law and the prophets." 2. *Duties to God.* To cherish and keep up the fruits of conversion, we must "wait," in communion with God. He only who begins can perfect the good work. Our sufficiency in every duty can only come from God. Hence, "wait on thy God continually." (*a*) *Wait in dependence upon God.* Such as turn to God truly will be careful to keep closely to God, and will feel their need of God daily. In him we live, and move, and have our being naturally and spiritually. Dependence is essential to spiritual life. Just as human wants promote human efforts and energies, so trust in God will prompt to love and duty. (*b*) *Wait with hope in*

God. Waiting implies hoping. The longer we wait the more we prove that our expectation is not crushed. The hopeless will be a lifeless soul; but hope kindles desire, and makes "expectation rise." "If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." (*c*) *Wait continually upon God.* There must be no cessation, no interruption of this duty. The greatest joy destroys not our dependence; the greatest failure should not drive us to despair. Sad desertions and apparent rejections do not warrant us to give up. "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."

PROSPERITY UNLAWFULLY GAINED AND ABUSED WILL BE TAKEN AWAY BY GOD.—*Verses* 7—9.

Israel was not like Jacob, who wrestled with God, but like a merchant who sought to become rich by fraud and oppression. Instead of keeping judgment and mercy (ver. 6), Ephraim prided himself in deceit, and justified his wickedness by its success. But God threatens to punish by stripping them of wealth, and throwing them into privation and distress.

I. Prosperity acquired by unlawful means. When men make haste to be rich, they rush into danger, and care nothing for the means, so that they accomplish the end. Trade is lawful, necessary, and advantageous. Prosperity is a cause for gratitude; but how many have become Canaanites in their character and conduct. 1. *Deceit.* "The balances of deceit are in his hand." Fraud is sadly too common now. Short weight and short measure, trickery and false dealing, evading legal duties, taking advantage of the unwary, are a flagrant breach of the golden rule, and an abomination to the God of truth (Prov. xx. 10). "That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter." 2. *Oppression.* "He loveth to oppress." Oppression assumes many forms. When artisans are compelled to buy at a loss at their master's premises, when their lawful wages are withheld, or their proper rights trampled upon, there is oppression. In all abuse of power and insolent treatment of others we see oppressive conduct. A bargain is sometimes unmerciful as a robbery, and wealth gained by oppression is of little value. "Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right." **II. Prosperity considered to justify wicked conduct.** "Ephraim said, Yet I am rich." I have succeeded; I must be right. If God prospers me, it is a proof that I am innocent, and that he is not displeased with me. Men have pleas for their sins, and excuses to ward off conviction from the word. Here we have—1. *Prosperity defended in pride.* "I am rich." Wealthy men are apt to be proud, to forget God, and claim honour and reverence from their fellow-men. Oppressors are esteemed great by the world; but men are to be judged by God's rule, not by man's rule. "Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways." 2. *Prosperity defended in self-righteousness.* "They shall find none iniquity in me." They protest their innocence, and declare none can find any *sin* in their buying and selling. None suspect themselves less than the self-righteous and the proud. They see fraud and deceit in other traders, but not in themselves. They glorify themselves, build up their fortunes, defend them by wickedness, and deceive their own souls. "Thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." **III. Prosperity abused will be taken away by God.** God reminds them of forgotten mercy. In all their history he never left himself without witness of his goodness. 1. *Past prosperity* was the gift of God. In one brief sentence he reviews the past and comprehends the present. "I that am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt." They were in bondage and slavery, and God delivered them. They depended upon him for food, clothing, and guidance in the wilderness. And they were grateful to God once, commemorated his goodness in feasts of tabernacles; but now these mercies are all forgotten. They boasted in their wealth, and sought it independently of God. God will therefore teach them

dependence upon him. 2. *Present prosperity* is the gift of God. From Egypt up to the present time have "I the Lord *thy* God" taken an interest in thee. Israel's possession of the land and deliverance from enemies, all their glory and wealth, had come from God. We have nothing that we have not received, and we should not boast as if we had not received it. Our skill and fortunes are from God, on whom we all depended. If we attribute all to self, and nothing to him, he will claim his own, and rob us of our enjoyments. 3. God who gives prosperity *can easily take it away.* He "will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles as in the days" of old. What a helpless people Israel were, when kings and nobles, rich and poor, left their palaces to dwell in booths! How unsettled their residence, and how slight the tenure of their worldly wealth which they held at the command of God! In God alone is power and stability, true riches and happiness. If we indulge in oppression, pride, and deceit—defend acts of injustice, and trust to unlawful gains, God will reduce us to poverty and want. "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished." Revenues without right can never be kept. When the judgment of God falls upon dishonest trades there will be no shelter. "Riches profit not in the day of wrath."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 8. *The shadow taken for the substance.* "I have found substance." 1. It is folly to take wealth and worldly honours as substance, for they are emptiness and vanity, things that are not (Prov. xxiii. 5; xxvii. 4). 2. It is wrong to think that we gain substance and prosperity by our own industry and skill. "*I* have found it." We say concerning our houses and fortunes, Look what "I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty." 3. It is selfish to think that all our substance is given for our own use merely. "I have found *me* out substance." Wealth, time, talents, and all are given in trust, to be employed for the good of others and the glory of God. 4. It is deceptive to think that wealth sinfully acquired will increase our happiness and protect our souls. The love of ease and oppression, pride and dishonesty, ripen for destruction. "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them." "In all time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us."

"*Find none iniquity in me.*" Characters innocent before men ungodly in the sight of God. Men considered successful, remarkable for business tact, and held up as examples, condemned and punished by God.

Honesty is the best policy. 1. As a matter of policy. 2. As a matter of principle. Character is property. A man may not be rich in this world, yet be rich towards God and in the general good will of men. "As a man can never be truly honest unless he be religious, so, on the other hand, whatever show of religion he may make, he cannot be truly religious in God's judgment unless he is honest in his conversation towards his neighbour" [*Bp Mant*].

HOMILETICS.

God's Method of Teaching the People.—*Verse* 10.

Ver. 10 expands ver. 9, and further proves that the people had no excuse for their ignorance and sin. God had taught them from the first, "at sundry times and in divers manners," by the prophets. Prophet succeeded prophet, and precept upon precept, line upon line, were given to impress Israel, and wean them from their sin. God speaks to men now by his word and providence.

I. The ministry of the prophets. "I have also spoken by the prophets." Israel at Sinai requested that God would speak to them through human messengers, and from Moses to Malachi they had proofs of mercy and condescension The

ministry of the gospel is a singular mercy (Is. xxx. 20), and suffers us not to walk in our own ways as other nations do (Acts xiv. 16). The prophets were "holy men of God," exalted to dignity and consecrated to office. They had Divine teaching and Divine authority in their message. To reject them was to despise God. The eminence of their position and the solemnity of their words, aggravate the guilt of sinners. God reveals his will and speaks to us in his word, and by his servants now. Time after time, by minister after minister, does he urge men to repent and turn to him. Fearful will be the punishment of those who disobey his voice. "The Lord hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear." **II. Visions of the night.** The prophets were seers, highly privileged, and favoured with visions and dreams of the night, "when deep sleep falleth upon men" (Job iv. 13). These visions were—1. *Continual.* "I have repeatedly and continually" instructed them by visions. Ezekiel and Daniel, Paul and John, had wonderful visions. "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream" (Num. xii. 6—8). 2. *Multiplied.* "I have multiplied visions." No age was left without its vision of the future. There were manifold dreams, and often a repetition of the same. If men disregard, God speaks once, yea twice, that he may bless them with light and truth. Such communications prove the dignity of our nature, the weakness of our fallen condition, and the connection of our souls with the invisible world. They are only given in secret, and require special strength and preparation to receive them (Dan. x. 7, 8, 17—19). **III. Similitudes of nature.** "And used similitudes." All nature is a similitude or parable. Christ directs our attention to the grass of the field and the face of the sky, the earthly and heavenly sides of creation. God himself employed them (Is. liv. 5; v. 1), and taught the prophets to use them. Christ taught by parables, and his servants cannot do better than imitate him. The manner as well as the matter of preaching must commend itself to the people. Material signs symbolize spiritual truths. "Things take the signature of thought," and we may find theology "wrought in each flower, inscribed on every tree."

> Tongues in trees; books in the running brooks;
> Sermons in stones; and good in everything.

This method is simple and attractive, impressive and successful. The great teacher sanctions and commends it, and "the common people heard him gladly."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

The frequency and continuance of a ministry indicate God's care and kindness to a people. But the more means of grace we have, the more earnest and powerful the sermons we hear, the greater our account if we persist in sin. "Ministers must turn themselves into all forms and shapes, both of spirit and speech, for the reaching of their hearer's hearts; they must come unto them in the most wooing, winning, and convincing way that may be. Only in using of similes, they must—1. Bring them from things known and familiar, things that their hearers are most acquainted with and accustomed to. 2. Similes must be very natural, plain, and proper. 3. They must not be too far urged [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

SINS REPROVED BY THE VIRTUES OF PROGENITORS, AND PUNISHED BY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.—*Verses* 11—14.

Israel did not permit themselves to be warned and taught, gave themselves up to idolatry and superstition. Conduct which contrasted greatly with Jacob their

ancestor. He had become rich by God's blessing on honest toil, but they were given to wicked customs, which provoked God to anger, destroyed the nation, and banished the people out of the land.

I. Sins reproved by ancestral virtues. Jacob is again referred to that they might learn his humiliation and servitude. 1. *Jacob's conduct reproves them.* His faith reproved their unbelief, and his devotion to God their idolatry. He fled from an angry brother, and served a covetous uncle for a wife, rather than marry an idolatress (Gen. xxviii. 5). He laboured with diligence, endured injustice, and trusted in God. But they were dishonest in their trade, and insolent in their behaviour. Honest poverty is better than dishonestly-gotten wealth. "I have searched carefully through all the traditions of our family," said Livingstone's ancestor to his children round his death-bed, "and I never could discover that there was a dishonest man among our forefathers. If, therefore, any of you should take to dishonest ways, it will not be because it was in our blood. I leave this precept with you—*Be honest.*" 2. *Jacob's blessing reproves them.* He set out with his staff alone, and became two bands (Gen. xxxii. 10). The Syrian ready to perish became a mighty nation (Deut. xxvi. 25). God preserved the fugitive and exalted him to honour. But Israel, forsaking God and enriching himself, would be dishonoured and driven into exile. God alone is the source of wealth, and honest toil the spring of national prosperity. "Not what I have, but what I do, is my kingdom," says Carlyle. "A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent" (Prov. xxviii. 22, 23; x. 22). **II. Sins punished by God's providence.** Israel's ingratitude and corrupt practices brought severe judgment upon them. 1. *The desert of their sins.* (*a*) It was found in places of sacred note. In Gilead and Gilgal, sacred in history and beautiful by nature, "only man was vile." Spots of signal blessing may become scenes of pollution and guilt. Home, the house of God and the closet, may be consecrated to idols. (*b*) It was prevalent as the stones in the field. In east and west, in palace and cottage, it abounded. Like a malignant disease, it spread around. (*c*) It was morally corrupting. Their altars were like heaps of dung-hills; their worship was vanity, and their sacrifices worthless. Endless gifts and innumerable altars only corrupted the morals, and cursed the people. Mere forms will not satisfy the conscience. Moral decay will bring physical decay, and worthlessness will be punished by vanity. (*d*) It provoked God to anger (ver. 14). The provocations were most bitter and grievous. All sin is offensive to God, but sins against light and truth, sins in religious privileges and in Divine warnings, are exceeding sinful. (*e*) It was constantly committed. Committed against the goodness of God, in delivering them from bondage, guiding them like a shepherd, and teaching them with a prophet. God keeps and blesses men, but they despise his love, and bring condemnation upon themselves. 2. *The punishment of their sins.* "Therefore shall he leave his blood upon him." (*a*) The penalty shall not be taken away. His blood shall rest upon his own head; for he is guilty and deserves death (Lev. xx. 9; Josh. ii. 9; 2 Sam. i. 10). Blood had been shed profusely, and the guilt of his sin remained upon his soul, and punishment cannot be longer delayed. (*b*) The dishonour done to God shall be given to him. Idolatry is an insult to our Maker, robbing him of his glory, and giving it to the likeness of a man or a beast. Those who reproach God will be dishonoured themselves. For centuries shame and reproach have been the lot of God's unbelieving people. What a warning to us! What an aggravation of misery to be inflicted by God who desired to bless! If "*his Lord*" turns against the sinner, who can deliver him? Shame and contempt on earth, "shame and everlasting contempt" hereafter! "Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 10—14. *Memorials of God's goodness to a people. I. He raised them from meanness to honour.* Jacob a poor fugitive, Israel a mighty nation. *II. He raised them from bondage to liberty.* "Brought Israel out of Egypt," and gave them freedom to worship God. He thus acquires special gratitude and service. *III. He taught them by his prophets.* By Moses (ver. 13) and by the ministry of others (ver. 10). *IV. He guided them by his providence.* As Jacob kept sheep, so Israel was kept and preserved by God. Special care and kindness were displayed towards them as a flock (Ps. lxxx. 1; Is. lxiii. 11).

Ver. 11. Certain places and certain altars do not palliate guilt, but testify against it, and prove all forms to be vain and deceitful. Considering the meanness of our origin, we should magnify God's grace in present prosperity. The Atheist expects riches from diligence alone; the slothful without it; but the true Christian from the blessing of God with it. "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it."

Ver. 12, 13. Scripture narratives are useful to remind of sin, warn us of danger, and urge us to God. They were written for our learning (Rom. xv. 4).

Ver. 13. "*By a prophet of the Lord.*" God chooses the humblest instruments to do the mightiest works. "A prophet he is purposely called, and his name concealed: 1. To show that the work was done, not by might nor by power, but by God's Spirit (Zech. iv. 6). 2. To show what God will do for his people by the prayers, and for the sake of his prophets, when they are most shiftless and hopeless. 3. To let this unworthy people see how much God had done for them once by a prophet, how little soever now they set by such."

Heirs of grace may suffer humiliation and distress. In Christ the fullest measure was seen. His people must have their portion.

Ver. 14. "Let us remember if we will not have God for *our* God in service, we must have him in spite of ourselves as *our Lord* to judge and punish us. Let us rather prove his love than his avenging justice" [*Fausset*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1. *Wind.* Plants can feed upon ashes, the worm upon earth, but man's spiritual appetite requires higher and more nutritious food. Wind will not nourish. To chase after worldly pleasure, and depend upon worldly aid in time of distress, will disappoint and toss the soul in disquietude and misery. The sinner's labours are a great nothing. "My life is wind."

Ver. 2. *Recompense.* God would have us read our sins in our judgments, that we might both repent of our sins and give glory to his justice [*Bp Hall*].

Ver. 3, 4. *Power.* We might be like Bartholomew, who is said to have had a hundred prayers for the morning, and as many for the evening, and all be of no avail. "Fervency of spirit" is that which avails much [*Bp Hall*]. He that has never prayed, can never conceive; and he that has prayed as he ought, can never forget how much is to be gained by prayer [*Dr Young*].

Prayer ardent opens heaven, lets down a stream
Of glory on the consecrated hour
Of man, in audience with Deity.

Ver. 5. *God.* When holy Augustine walked by the sea-side, wrapt in the meditation of God and of his ways, he heard a voice which bade him lade the ocean with a cockle-shell. We may sooner drain the ocean with such a shell, or with a spoon, than the perfections of God with our largest understandings [*Caryl*]. A king is there where his court is, where his train and retinue are; so God the Lord of Hosts is there specially present where the heavenly guard, the blessed angels, keep their station and rendezvous [*Mede*].

Ver. 6. *Judgment.* The one thing

constantly reiterated by our master; the order of all others that is given oftenest, "Do justice and judgment." That's your Bible order; that's the "service of God," not praying or psalm-singing. Unless we perform Divine service in every willing act of life we never perform it at all. The one Divine work—the one ordered sacrifice—is to do justice; and it is the last we are ever inclined to do [*Ruskin*].

Ver. 7, 8. *Rich.* Endeavour to be honestly rich, or contentedly poor; but be sure that your riches be justly got, or you spoil all [*Izaak Walton*]. He that resteth upon gains certain, shall hardly grow to great riches; and he that puts all upon adventures, doth oftentimes break and come to poverty. It is good, therefore, to guard adventures with certainties that may uphold losses [*Bacon*].

Ver. 10. *Similitudes.* I remember well, how once God preached to me by a similitude in the depth of winter. The earth had been black, and there was scarcely a green thing or flower to be seen. There was nothing but blackness as you looked around—bare hedges, leafless trees, and black, black earth wherever you looked. On a sudden God spake and unlocked the treasures of snow, and white flakes descended, until there was no blackness to be seen, all was one sheet of dazzling whiteness. I was seeking the Saviour, and it was then I found him. I remember well that sermon. "Come now and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be whiter than wool" [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 11—14. *Vanity.* In his religion. His holiness is vain conceit; his natural light, Egyptian darkness; his religious forms, "a vain show in the flesh." In outward circumstances. His rank, a bauble; his beauty, a fading flower; his wealth but glittering dust. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." *Jacob's life.* No kind of studious entertainment doth so generally delight as history, or the tradition of remarkable examples: even those who have an abhorrency or indisposition toward other studies are yet often much taken with historical narrations. And such are those which present to us the lives and examples of holy men, abounding with wonders of providence and grace: no attempts so gallant, no exploits so illustrious as those which have been achieved by the faith and patience, by the prudence and courage of the ancient saints; they do far surpass the most famous achievements of pagan heroes. No triumphs are comparable to those of piety; no trophies are so magnificent and durable as those which victorious faith erecteth; that history therefore which reports the *res gestæ*, the acts and sufferings of most pious men, must in reason be esteemed, not only the most useful, but also the most pleasant [*Barrow*].

CHAPTER XIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] 1. **Eph.**] formerly enjoyed great distinction in Israel. Men listened with fear and trembling to him (Job xxix. 21); he exalted himself, secured the rule among the tribes, and then seceded and established a separate kingdom. By the introduction of the worship of Baal and the custom of calf-worship he offended and died. Two conditions of Eph. are contrasted, prosperity and destruction. 2. **Sin**] Add sin to sin, *i.e.* continue in former transgressions. "This seems to be a third stage in sin. First, under Jeroboam, was the worship of the calves. Then, under Ahab, the worship of Baal. Thirdly, the multiplying of other idols (2 Kings xvii. 9, 10), penetrating and pervading the private life, even of their less wealthy people" [*Pusey*]. **Say of them**] Such things as these mentioned. **Kiss**] An act of adoration (Ps. ii. 2; cvi. 20). 3. **Therefore**] punishment shall be swift. Their goodness is fleeting as the dew, and the morning cloud; their prosperity worthless as the chaff or the smoke. 4. **Yet**] Another contrast between the idolatry of Israel and the mercy of God to them (cf. xii. 10). 5. **Know**] *i.e.* cared for them, and loved them as his own (Ps. cxliv. 3; Amos iii. 2). 6.] A reproof from cattle growing wanton in abundant pasture; the very thing

against which they were warned (Deut. viii. 11; xxxii. 15). **7. Therefore**] Israel, the flock in the field, shall be devoured by wild beasts, fierce as a **lion**, swift as a **leopard**, and savage as a **bear** robbed of her whelps (1 Sam. xvii. 34; 2 Sam. xvii. 8). **9.**] This destruction is entirely their own. Against God, men are against their own help and welfare. **10. Where**] thy king to save when Assyrians attack cities? Where thy **judges** who surround the king and help to administer right? God gave and God punished them through a king. **12. Bound up**] like money in a bag, and put in secret places (Job xiv. 17; 1 Sam. xxv. 29). The punishment preserved, kept in store, is certain to come (Job xxi. 19). **13.**] Pains and violent agony, sorrows like a woman in child-birth shall come (Jer. xxx. 6). **Unwise**] in not foreseeing and escaping the danger (Prov. xxii. 3). **14.**] May be applied to Israel's deliverance from Assyria, then to future times of restoration, which typify redemption in Christ and resurrection from death at last. Believers should never despair. **15.**] The name *Eph.* shall become a truth, and the blessings promised shall not be lost (Gen. xlviii. 4, 20; xlix. 22), say some. But promises are only fulfilled when persons keep to the conditions. In Ephraim and in the Christian Church those only are saved who walk with God. Whatever be the appearance of the fruitful field, judgments will be like a fearful tempest which will destroy all before them (Jer. iv. 11; xviii. 17; Ezek. xix. 12). **He**] The conqueror will plunder and destroy all costly vessels. **16. Her God**] An aggravation of guilt because against him who made himself her God. The destruction was complete. The living children dashed to pieces, and the unborn to be destroyed in their mother's womb (2 Kings viii. 12; xv. 16; Amos i. 13). Not a memorial left of all the outward pomp and prosperity. When God is forsaken for the world, the choice will be regretted.

HOMILETICS.

Self-estimation the Measure of Religious Influence.—*Verses* 1—3.

God raised Ephraim to chief power, and Judah was afraid of him. Through God's goodness he was respected; but when he sinned, he lost his reputation and honour. When he exalted himself, he offended and died. When we walk humbly before God we prosper; but when we are proud and forsake him we die.

I. Humility exalts. "When Ephraim spake" all reverently feared him. "Princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth." Men whom God blesses have mighty influence. 1. *Humility exalts before God.* God looks upon the contrite, and dwells with the humble. The world counts nothing great without display. The "honour that cometh from God only" is despised. Men like Job, Isaiah, and Paul, who abhor themselves in dust and ashes, are considered weak-minded. Humility is not a heathen, but a Christian, virtue. Conscious dependence upon God, as the animating principle of life in all its relations and duties, is opposed to the self-esteem and self-confidence of modern philosophy. True humility will lead to dependence upon God, and those who trust most in God will be the strongest and most honoured by God. Such "the king delighteth to honour." 2. *Humility exalts before men.* Self-conceit will lower men in the estimation of others; but a true spirit and noble life will gain real worth. The dogmatical opinion, the fancied superiority, the over-weening pride of men will clothe them with shame (Prov. xxvi. 12; xxix. 20). We lost our position through pride, and must recover it by humility. He that would build a lasting fame must begin low. David was as distinguished in retirement as in the court of Saul. Washington as a private citizen was admired as much as Washington the commander of an army. Some become great by elevation, others by condescension. We stoop to conquer, and "before honour is humility." When God exalts and magnifies men, they are formidable, as Joshua and Moses. When crowned with virtues, and strong in faith, they are greater than Alexander and Cæsar. "It is an uncontroverted truth," said Swift, "that no man ever made an ill figure who understood his own talents, nor a good one who mistook them." "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

II. Self-exaltation destroys. The proud and insolent fall into danger. "A man's pride shall bring him low; but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit." 1. *Self-exaltation tends to idolatry.* Man unduly values himself, and raises himself to lofty heights only to fall from them. Men are proud of rank, talent, and success. They adore their gold and silver, and make idols of vanities. Disaffected toward God, they run to excess, unchecked by Divine goodness, and emboldened by human

flattery. They lean "to their own understanding," and reject the word of God. They cut out and carve images of their own, multiply and deify gods with their own fancies, and worship them. "Go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands." 2. *Self-exaltation tends to self-degradation.* "Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves." What a degradation for king and counsellors, priests and people, to fall down to calves! What do we see now? The objects may be changed, but the same spirit is displayed. We have rivals of the Living God in the forms of human device. Potentates and princes kiss the feet of the Pope. Rich and poor adore the consecrated wafer, and fall before the golden crucifix. In the Christian Church, we have "craftsmen," and gods that oppose and exalt themselves "above all that is called God." Mortals sitting "as God in the temple of God," and demanding the homage and service which are due to God. God has made us for himself, and to kiss any idol is to degrade our mental and moral nature. "Stand up; I myself also am a man." 3. *Self-exaltation tends to self-destruction.* "When he offended in Baal, he died" by the judgments of God, which he brought upon himself. (1) *It increases sin.* "They sin more and more." They added one sin to another, until it became habitual and universal. Sin is essentially cumulative in its nature and consequences. One sin contains and brings on another. The perversion of religion leads to more ungodliness. To the guilt of idolatry is added obstinate persistence in evil courses. Under the pretence of ignorance and infirmity, idolators pursue their malicious designs. 2. *It brings destruction.* "He died." Death, spiritual and eternal, is the penalty of sin. Israel died as a kingdom and nation. God is the fountain of all life, and departure from him is real death. "The wages of sin is death." All prosperity and reputation based on wickedness, will violently and swiftly pass away like the morning cloud and the early dew. Every fleeting object in nature preaches the vanity of idolatry, and the transient hopes built upon it. Judgments upon the proud and impenitent will bring utter desolation. "As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more; but the righteous is an everlasting foundation."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. Natural conscience cannot but stoop to the image of God in whomsoever found. When Ephraim was first in the throne he became formidable; but when he fell openly from God he grew feeble; first he was a terror and then a scorn [*Trapp*].

Ver. 2. *Idolatry. I. Its origin.* A human creation. "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." Discontent with God, they have *invented* a new mode of happiness. The first invention was the parent of *many*, all marked by the same folly and lies. Craftsmen now make their own deities, and worship creatures inferior to themselves. 1. *An idol is the conception of man.* It was the device of the human mind. It represents what the mind has imagined, and is no better, no higher than its creator. "Idols according to their own understanding." 2. *An idol is the work of man.* "All of it the work of the craftsmen," who completed with their hands what they conceived with their minds. Diana was said to have come from Jupiter (Acts xix. 35); but men stamp their names upon and give their hearts to their own workmanship (Is. xliv. 9). The scene at Sinai is often repeated in history and experience. "These be thy Gods, O Israel." *II. Its expense.* "Molten images of their silver." Wood and stone were not good enough. Gold and silver were thought to honour and exalt the gods. Wealth is often lavished on selfish ends, and men spare no expense to decorate and support their own idols. They tax their minds and spend their silver in the service of sin. What a blessing if men would devote as much time and energy in the service of God as in the

cause of idolatry! *III. Its degradation.* "*Men kiss the calves.*" 1. *It degrades human nature.* When we exclude spiritual interests, inferior matters become great, and the same energy of mind that might be employed for good will be expended in evil. The mind contracts its dimensions, impairs its powers, by devoting itself to objects below itself, and lowers itself to the level of those objects. But applied to higher objects, it is expanded, elevated, and strengthened. God's service dignifies human nature by giving it useful activity, wise direction, and Divine influence. 2. *It degrades the Divine nature.* The conceptions and ideas of a corrupt mind are in harmony with that mind. Its worship is "according to the flesh." As man cannot rise to God, God is brought down to the level of sinful man. "And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." *IV. Its guilt.* "They add sin to sin." Idolatry is not a mere mistake, nor infirmity, but a guilty departure from God. 1. *Men sin by forgetting God.* We never forget anything in which we take great interest. The carnal mind takes no interest in God, is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God. God is excluded from the thoughts and life of the wicked. 2. *Men sin by substituting idols for God.* Men will worship something. If the true God is forsaken, they make gods of their own. This provokes God to anger, and brings misery upon them. Impenitence after Divine chastisement, perseverance in known sin after Divine warning, will aggravate human guilt, and result in "fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which will devour the adversary." "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way."

Ver. 3. *The prosperity of the wicked. I. It is of short duration.* It may flourish and make a fair show for a while; but it vanishes away. It is evanescent "as the *early dew*," which glistens only to pass away. It is deceptive "as the *morning cloud*." You admire its beauty and changing hues. But its existence is short; it is only a temporary substance, and like men's goodness, "it goeth away" (ch. vi. 4). *II. It is worthless in its nature.* If it continues long it does not satisfy. Like *chaff*, it is light and unsubstantial; lifted up, the sport of every wind, and carried along to be seen no more. "As *smoke* out of the chimney," empty, baseless, and inflated, it disappears for ever. Such the prosperity of Ephraim, and such the prosperity built on any wickedness. The wicked may seem to live and flourish; but they sin, die, and perish eternally. "Virtue makes man upright and stable, vice, empty and unstable," says an author. "They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away" (Job xxi. 18; Ps. i. 4; xxxv. 5; Prov. xiv. 32).

HOMILETICS.

God the only Saviour.—*Verse* 4.

The people may be worthless, and driven away like smoke, but God is the same as of old. None else should be their Saviour. They should know and worship no other but Jehovah.

I. This character of God is declared in his word. Since we cannot know God but by revelation, how precious is that volume in which all manifestations of him are embodied. We are constantly reminded of his attributes and relations. The knowledge of them is of supreme consequence, and repeatedly set before us, that we may not forget. "There is one God; and there is none other god but he." "I am the Lord, and there is none else: there is no god beside me." "Thou shalt have none other gods but me." "Is there a god besides me? Yea, there is no god; I know not any." "I am the Lord, that is my name; and my glory will I not give to another; neither my praise to graven images." II. This character of God is displayed in his providence. "The Lord thy God from the land of

Egypt." Israel are not only reminded of God's revelations previously given, but of his character displayed in his providence towards them. The events of their history are briefly stated, and their own experience testifies to the truth of God's word. He had guided and provided for them unceasingly, and saved when there was no strange God among them. Men have abundant proofs in their own lives that God alone can save. In sickness and distress, in domestic and national history, the goodness of God has been displayed. The sinner and the saint have been delivered from dangers, and can declare this. "Ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me?" **III. In proportion as we know this character of God are we obligated to him.** "Thou shalt know no God but me." It is not enough to acknowledge God as a Saviour. His claims and glory must not be shared with another. He has natural and moral rights over us. We owe duties and homage to him. We must evince our belief, and express our regard, by constant obedience to his law, studious efforts to do and delight in his will, in enjoyments and sufferings, and recognizing his presence in his word, providence, and grace. We are forbidden to indulge in atheism, polytheism, and idolatry. We must know and fear God only. We must love and serve him, with all our heart, soul, and strength.

No Saviour beside God.—*Verse* 4.

There is no Saviour beside me.

I. What the words imply. That God is—1. *A powerful Saviour*, proved from the nature of redemption and the events of providence. No sins can limit his grace, no enemy baffle his skill. Save to the uttermost (Heb. vii. 25). 2. *A constant Saviour.* Present with Israel in Egypt, the wilderness, and the land of Canaan. Present with us in every time of need. 3. *An only Saviour.* No other could do what he did for Israel. No other can pardon our sins, renew our hearts, and save our souls. There is salvation in none other, "for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." **II. What the words forbid.** They forbid—1. *The worship of images.* We are not to make any likeness of things in heaven above, earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. God is the object of supreme worship and affection; incapable of representation to the senses, like false deities of men. 2. *The worship of God by images.* We dishonour God when we attempt to worship him "in gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device" (Acts xvii. 29). 3. *All hypocrisy and formality in worship.* Excessive use of forms and ceremonies is forbidden. God is a spirit, and all worship must be in spirit and in truth. Is he the only Saviour? Then let us thank him and trust him more. In private and in public, let us earnestly and constantly look to him. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Help in the Exigencies of Life.—*Verse* 5.

God loved and provided for his people in the wilderness. "In the land of great drought" and danger he never forsook them. Hence they should know and follow him. God is with his children now in the exigencies of life.

I. Our sinful condition is a wilderness. A barren and unfruitful land, where no water is. Without God the sinner is destitute of happiness and hope. He can neither quench his thirst nor satisfy his desires in sin. But God leads his people from sin to Christ. He knows the anguish and despair of the penitent, and gives joy and peace in believing. II. Our outward circumstances are a wilderness. What uncertainty and change! What disappointment and sorrows! We are often led into solitude and distress, and have to cry unto God. We are often thrown into danger and surrounded by enemies. "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way: they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he de-

livered them out of their distresses." **III. Our inward experience is a wilderness.** We are not self-sufficient. We do not carry our own resources within us. We have neither power to defend nor wisdom to guide us. Day by day we depend upon God, and have to live by faith, hope, and obedience. But God knows our emptiness, and sends manna from heaven. His presence is continually with us, and he provides a table in the wilderness. We are brought safely "through a land of deserts and of pits; through a land of drought and of the shadow of death; through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt." "Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved of the Lord?" God's goodness forms a marked contrast to the conduct of our fellow-creatures. We should show pity to one another. But, alas! we scarcely know a friend in trouble! God's goodness should lead us to know and love him. Does God *know* that we are weaned from the world—in love with the means of grace, and ready to follow and seek him at all times?

DIVINE GOODNESS TURNED INTO DIVINE WRATH.—*Verses* 5—8.

God knew and loved Israel in the wilderness, commended them in their low estate, but complained of them in their prosperity. When they were delivered from the privations and hardships of the desert, fixed in the land of vineyards and fig-trees, they forgot God in prosperity and pride, and brought upon them righteous displeasure.

I. Goodness displayed to the helpless. "I did know thee in the wilderness." When Israel were a helpless and dependent people, they often cried to God in distress, and he heard and helped them. Their situation yielded no supplies, but God permitted them to want no good thing. He gave them water from the rock and bread from heaven; suffered not their raiment to wax old upon them, nor their foot to swell in travelling; sent them his Holy Spirit to instruct, and ordinances to bless them. "He hath not dealt so with any nation." We are under the immediate care of God, who provides for us and defends us. Some one says, "Life is a great want, and therefore should be one continual prayer." **II. Goodness displayed to the ungrateful.** "Therefore have they forgotten me" (ver. 6). Their luxury, sensuality, and pride, made them insolent and secure. Worldly prosperity often feeds men's pride, and makes them forget the giver of it. They remember God in want and sickness, but forsake him in plenty and ease. "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked" (Deut. xxxii. 15, 18). Men seek *pasture*, self-gratification, and not God. They abuse every gift, because their *hearts are exalted* against him. Prosperity, which ought to draw them to him, alienates them from him. They are ungrateful in proportion as they should love and praise him. Thus selfishness ever tends to hardness of heart and ingratitude. "If a man lacks gratitude," says Pitt, "when there is infinite obligations to excite and quicken it, he will be likely to want all other virtues towards his fellow-creatures, whose utmost gifts are poor compared with those he daily receives from his never-failing Almighty Friend." "Then beware lest thou forget the Lord which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." **III. Goodness turned to wrath.** "Therefore I will be unto them as a lion," &c. Those who forget God in the gifts of his providence, wax fat and get proud in their prosperity, only prepare themselves a prey to retribution. Ingratitude at all times is most base. Capt. Speke found in the natives of central Africa the belief that "ingratitude, or neglecting to thank a person for a benefit conferred, is punishable." If ingratitude from man to man be odious, in the sight of God it is without excuse and despicable. Its guilt is increased in a fourfold proportion, and must be estimated by the greatness of the giver, the unworthiness of the receiver, and by the number and excellency of the blessings bestowed. The ungrateful are "a generation of vipers," who sting the bosom in which they have been nursed. How "sharper than a serpent's tooth" is an ungrateful child! 1. *Wrath most severe.* "I will

meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps." God is not overcome and carried away by passion as men. He is not vindictive in feeling, and unjust in his proceedings. But these figures set forth his determined opposition to wickedness, and the righteous visitation of judgment upon those who turn mercy into wrath. His anger will be fierce as a leopard watching by the way to seize upon travellers; furious as a bear enraged by the loss of her young; strong as a lion, the most terrible beast of the forest. 2. *Wrath most destructive.* The very vitals are destroyed. "*Rend* the caul," *devour* them "and *tear* them." The indignation, the punishment, seems almost beyond description. God can torture the soul, and cause his anger to burn against the sinner. "Who knoweth the power of his wrath?" He should be feared according to his anger, and praised for his goodness (Ps. xc. 11). His mercy should lead us to repentance and gratitude. Those who despise "the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering," treasure up unto themselves "wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 6. *Therefore have they forgotten me.* Ingratitude. 1. A common sin. 2. Most unnatural. 3. Most unreasonable. 4. Most dangerous. "How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I fed them to the full they committed adultery" (Jer. v. 7). *Forgotten me.* Forgotten their dependence upon me; their relationship to me; their duties to me. If not theoretically, men practically forget God (Ps. x. 4). Sins often connected with ingratitude, pride, hard-heartedness, selfishness, and idolatry. If men take gifts and feed upon *them*, in forgetfulness of the Giver, it need not be thought strange if God withholds them. Prosperity abused will be taken away. "When God gives thee prosperity, do thou enjoy it with a cheerful and thankful heart," says Bp Reynolds. "In all time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us," is a prayer never out of season in times of ease and plenty.

First—Selfish indulgence. "According to their pasture, *so* were they *filled*." God "giveth us richly all things to enjoy." But the enjoyment of Christians differs from the excess of the sensual. We are not to feast without fear; to make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. Many mistake and suppose everything their own. They are only stewards. The first lesson in the school of Christ is self-denial. Where does this appear in the lives of some? Temperance is one of the graces of the spirit. This consists not only in avoiding drunkenness and gluttony, but in not "*filling* ourselves *according* to our pasture."

Secondly—Pride. "They were filled, and their *heart was exalted*." Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefits received; for "his heart was lifted up." The apostle charges them that are rich in the world not "to trust in uncertain riches," and shows the tendency there always is in worldly success to gender vanity and false confidence. Hence it is said, "Pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment." They think highly of their understanding, as if wisdom grew with wealth. They speak with authority, and answer roughly.

Thirdly—Unmindfulness of God. "Therefore have they forgotten me." How common for men in the midst of their sufficiency to lose the sense of their obligations to God, dependence upon and need of him! Hence the prayer of Agar against being rich, "Lest I should be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?" Hence the caution to the Jews when they entered Canaan, "Lest thou forget the Lord which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt." The admonition was unavailable. This gives us a very humbling view of human nature. View it, not in the dregs of society, but as seen in common and reputable life. It will not appear so innocent, so amiable, so noble as some

represent it to be. Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? Let the fact arouse us to caution and circumspection, if Providence smiles upon us, and we are placed in easy and comfortable circumstances. Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. Seek grace which only can help to manage a full estate properly, so as to elude its snares and discharge its duties. It was said of Vespasian, that he was even a better man for being an emperor. So the prosperity of some, instead of destroying them, displays and increases their excellency; they are rich, not only in temporal things, but in faith and good works [*Jay*].

HOMILETICS.

Moral Suicide and Divine Help.—*Verse* 9.

The prophet once more refers to the cause of their sorrow, and declares God to be their only help when they were ruined and undone.

I. **Moral suicide.** "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." Many moral as well as physical evils may be traced to want of well-trained spiritual power, well exercised self-control, and to absence of life in the soul. Solomon contrasts the influence of sin with the health of a true heart. "A sound heart is the life of the flesh; but envy is the rottenness of the bones" (Prov. xiv. 30; xvii. 22). Sin is madness, and not medicine; death, and not life. 1. *All sin is destructive.* It is essentially death. It ruins the soul. "The soul that sinneth it shall *die*." It often destroys reputation and character. It always destroys liberty, peace, and happiness. It is contrary to the constitution and health of the soul; hence the misery which is ever felt. It wounds the conscience, impairs the judgment, and brings disease and manifold deaths. He who forsakes God and worships idols "destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get" (Prov. vi. 32, 33; v. 22, 23). 2. *Voluntary sin is voluntary destruction.* "Thou hast *destroyed thyself*." The sinner commits moral suicide, and has no one to blame but himself. Circumstances do not force him to sin. Fate, admitting such a thing, does not compel him. God destroys him not; for he is not willing that any should perish, but that all men should be saved (Jer. xxvii. 13, Ezek. xviii. 31). Men are the authors of their own destruction. They may blame whom they like, but the guilt rests upon their own head. Every bait to sin is the temptation to suicide—to self-murder. Sinners die because they will die and not live. They are inexcusable, and make their doom more intolerable, because they choose death rather than life. "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul, all they that hate me love death." II. **Divine help.** "In me is thine help." A wise man will call the best medical help he can find in times of sickness and danger. This disease defies the skill of man. There is a consumption of the body which no man can cure; and there is a consumption of the soul more deadly in its nature. Man may destroy himself, but God only can restore him. 1. *Help the most free.* We might have been left to perish in our sin, but God loved us and saved us in our blood (Ezek. xvi. 6). God was not desired, not constrained to do anything. Desert there was none. "According to his mercy he saved us." "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." 2 *Help the most suitable.* As the beauties of nature are adapted to the senses, and food to the taste, so the gospel is suited to our wants and woes, our weakness and danger. 3. *Help the most efficient.* Nothing less than an Almighty Saviour would do for mankind. The wounds are sore and the breach is great, who can heal thee? (Lam. ii. 13). "I am the Lord that healeth thee." The blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. The grace of God subdues the proudest rebel and upholds the weakest believer. God is mighty to save. "I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me." 4. *Help the most extensive.* God can not only help beyond desert, but save to the uttermost

all that come unto him. None are excluded, except those who exclude themselves from his help. Everywhere the invitations of Scripture are full, free, and universal. "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." "Let him take hold of my strength."

I know the grace is only thine,
The gift of faith is all Divine;
But if on thee we call,
Thou wilt the benefit bestow,
And give us hearts to feel and know,
That thou hast died for all.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

The malady is of no ordinary character. It is not a mere slight indisposition—a trifling attack—a little derangement of the system, but a sickness unto death—an incurable disease.

The physician is able, kind, and free. "Without money and without price" cures are given. Others heal the hurt slightly (Jer. vi. 14), or physicians of no value; but God heals, and we are healed (Jer. xvii. 14). We hear much of "the cure of souls," let us not forget to care for them. God has healed and will heal by his word, Spirit, and grace. "Lord, be merciful unto me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee."

First, Sin, self-destruction. It destroys the health and moral beauty of the soul; disables from duty, and ends in death

Secondly, God, the sole restorer, working in us perfect soundness, saving us and granting us help in time of need.

Nothing can destroy us before God but sin, the only real evil; and sin is wholly from us, God can have no part in it. But every aid to withdraw us from sin, or to hinder us from falling into it, comes from God alone, the sole source of our salvation. The soul, then, must ever bless God, in its ills and its good; in its ills, by confessing that itself is the only cause of its suffering; in its good, owning that, when altogether unworthy of it, God prevented it by his grace, and preserves it each instant by his Almighty goodness [*St Bernard*].

HOMILETICS.

God the only King.—*Verses* 10, 11.

God shows again how he will help them. When their kings and princes—whom they sinfully sought, and whom God would take away in displeasure—could not save them even in one city, he would prove their King and Helper.

I. God is our lawful king. "I will be thy king," &c. God proclaims himself the source of wisdom and counsel, of power and authority. 1. *Man requires a king.* Our moral constitution is a witness that we are under authority, made to obey laws, and are only happy in loyal obedience. To satisfy his wants, man has often gone to his fellow-men, trusting to them, because thought to be great, wise, and even divine. Hence nations and ages have had their heroes, poets, orators, and prophets. But man still cries for a king. No human person can satisfy the totality of his nature, remove his guilt and fear, and reconcile the conflict between conscience and heart. God alone is the rest and satisfaction of the soul. No code of laws, no idea of society, though pure and transcendant as that of Plato, can supply the want of a king. God in Christ reveals his claims, and demands our homage and obedience. He is our Divine lawgiver and sovereign Lord. "Behold your king!" 2. *God alone should be our king.* "We are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand." He feeds and guides us by his special providence, like a shepherd leading his flock. He has dominion over heaven and earth, therefore worship is due to him. He demands obedience, and to refuse is most unreasonable and most insulting. "For God is the king of all the earth." **II. God is**

often rejected by the choice of an unlawful king. "Thou saidst, Give me a king and princes." Israel rejected God and demanded Saul, and subsequently chose Jeroboam to free them from the taxes imposed by Rehoboam. They despised God, and looked to man for help. "Nay, but we will have a king over us, that we may also be like other nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles." God is often put *in competition* with others. Half-prayers and half-allegiance are given to him. Some other god is sought and served with him. God is sometimes *rejected*, and an idol set up to govern our hearts and lives. In distress and social pressure we flee to man. Pleasure, passions, and the world rule over us. God is dethroned, and our affections are centered on self, or an unlawful sovereign. The heart can only have one power supreme, one king enthroned at once. Whatever monarch that may be, it dictates to every faculty and every effort, saying, "Do this," and it does it. Obedience is willingly and continually given. As the beginning, such will be the end; as the rule, such will be the result. "But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble; for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah." **III. When God is rejected and another king chosen the end will be misery.** "Where is any other that will save thee in all thy cities?" God was against Israel and their kings. As they began by rejecting God, so they end in rejection by God. Civil commotions, anarchy and murder, were the repeated issue. Not one *in all their cities* could help them when God had forsaken them. Sinful rulers will be tyrants, and their rule will ever prove impotent and destructive. 1. *Sometimes our supports are taken away.* "I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath." What God gives or permits us to take to ourselves he can take away. By rejecting God we cannot defeat his purpose. We may have our wish granted, yet be disappointed in our choice. The gift and its loss will be a grief to us. What we inordinately desire, what we are determined to have in opposition to God's will, whether granted, withheld, or taken away, will be the occasion of wrath and tribulation to our souls. "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, and then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you." 2. *If our supports are not taken away they are rendered impotent.* "Where is any that may save thee?" Kings and princes may be shorn of power. Danger may threaten every city in the nation, and blessings unlawfully gained or ungratefully abused afford no shelter. All courses and carnal policies of men will not avail against God. If we forsake God disappointment will meet us in every condition, and a way which is cursed at the beginning will be more cursed at the end. In *anger* a king was given; in *wrath* was he taken away. There is no help but in God. "I will be thy king."

INIQUITY RESERVED FOR FUTURE PUNISHMENT.—*Verses* 12, 13.

The nation had accumulated wickedness from time to time. This sin, though spared, was not forgotten, but sealed up and reserved for future judgment. The affairs were coming to a crisis, like a woman in travail, and could not be avoided. Unless they rescued themselves from the danger, the result would be that individual citizens and political existence would entirely perish. Hence, they should not neglect the means, but earnestly seek God before it was too late.

I. Iniquity is treasured up by God. "The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up." Men treasure or seal up what they want to keep. Sin is hid by a wonderful providence to be accounted for at a future time. "My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity." 1. *God does not forget iniquity.* He numbers our steps, keeps a strict account of our actions, and brings sin to our remembrance. We are not to presume on God's forbearance, and think because sin is not punished it is forgotten (Ecc. viii. 11). This is to ignore the future and treasure up "wrath against the day of wrath" (Rom. ii. 5). 2. *God does not for-*

give iniquity without repentance. If sin is not confessed and forsaken, it is stored up. Unrepented sin is an ever-increasing store, hid from the sight of men, but of which God will lose nothing. Sinners may excuse and defend themselves in pride and self-righteousness, but a day of accounts will come. "Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures? To me belongeth vengeance and recompense." **II. Iniquity treasured up by God will be punished.** "The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him." 1. *This punishment is certain,* "*shall* come." There is an order of sequence in moral as in physical law, and we inevitably suffer if we break that order. Results are fixed and certain. Punishment may be long delayed, but cannot be avoided. Delay does not diminish its certainty either here or hereafter. "Evil *pursueth* sinners." 2. *This punishment is distressing.* Agony unexpected and inevitable. Sorrows often in this life, and in the life to come the full cup of bitterness. "Avenging deities are shod with wool," but they never pause nor mitigate their judgments. We may doubt or deny the fact, but we see day by day that "the mill of God grinds late, but grinds to powder." "Never sin went unpunished," says one, "and the end of all sin, if it be not repentance, is hell." **III. If men do not escape from iniquity treasured up they are foolish.** "For he should not stay long in the place." He that lingers between death and life, and vacillates between God and the world, "is an unwise son." If we "stay long," and delay in anything, we never bring forth results. Decision is necessary. Despatch is better than discourse. Men who halt are at the mercy of every temptation and fall before the foe. "I never defer till to-morrow what can be done to-day," declared one. But when immortal interests are at stake, what folly to hesitate or resist. How fatally "unwise," to put off repentance and return to God. Judgment is impending, to-morrow may be too late. "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished."

Lose this day, loitering, 'twill be the same story
To-morrow, and the next more dilatory.
The indecision brings its own delays,
And days are lost lamenting o'er lost days.
Are you in earnest? seize this very minute!
What you can do, or think you can, begin it!
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it!
Only engage, and then the mind grows heated;
Begin it, and the work will be completed!

THE GREAT CONQUEST.—*Verse* 14.

To preserve his people from despair, God promises to help them. Though like dead men in the grave, he will redeem them, and they shall triumph over death and destruction. He will never repent of this purpose concerning them.

I. The mighty enemies. 1. *We* have *death.* "I will redeem them from death." (*a*) Death as a *spiritual condition.* Sinners are dead in trespasses and sins. Senseless and helpless in their spiritual condition. But the Holy Spirit quickens, and Christ redeems them from their danger. The sentence against them is blotted out, the curse of sin removed, and they are delivered, raised to newness of life in Christ Jesus. (*b*) Death as a *reigning power.* Men live in captivity, are held in bondage, all their lifetime through the fear of death. It is a universal and resistless foe. It spares no rank and pauses for no request. It rends our hearts with grief, fills our homes with sorrow, and the grave with its victims. (*c*) Death as a *mortal enemy.* An enemy to Christ and his people. Till death is conquered, Christ cannot realize his hopes nor his people gain their inheritance. The mediatorial glory will never be acquired without this conquest. "The last *enemy* that shall be destroyed is death." 2. We have *the grave.* "The power of the grave." Like death, the grave has a mighty power, and is a triumphant foe. "The king of [illegible]rs" makes this his palace. "The grave is my house" (Job xvii. 13); "cry-

ing, Give, give" (Prov. xxx. 15). It has received its countless millions, and still craves and yawns for more. "Hell and destruction are never full." (*a*) As a mighty terror, and (*b*) a final-resting place, it must be conquered to gain the crown and the kingdom. **II. The glorious conqueror.** "*I* will ransom, *I* will redeem," says God. None but God could deliver from such a state of misery and death. God in Christ conquers death and hell. "He will swallow up death in victory" (Is. xxv. 8). The Captain of our salvation has entered into the conflict for us, and come out victorious. "He hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light." "He hath destroyed him that had the power of death" (Heb. ii. 14), and his victory becomes ours by faith. "I am the resurrection and the life: whoso believeth in me shall never die." **III. The wonderful method of conquest.** "I will *ransom*." "I will *redeem*." 1. *Christ has paid a price for our deliverance.* He hath redeemed us by his blood. "Who gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. ii. 6; Matt. xx. 28). He became near of kin, by taking our nature and suffering in our stead. The first and second death are overcome by him. He is the plague of death and the destruction of the grave. Death the curse is turned into a blessing; death an enemy is changed into a friend, and the grave is made the portal to glory. "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." 2. *Christ does now morally deliver us.* The blessing is not a prospective one. It is enjoyed in the present time, as an earnest and foretaste. The Spirit enlightens and grace redeems from the power of sin and corruption. The people of God are free and live without fear of death. The weakest believer confronts his deadliest foe, answers every accusation by pointing to "the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us." We are not merely conquerors, but *triumphant*, "more than conquerors through him that loved us." The benefits of redemption have become "powers in the world to come," and powers in the heart and life of a Christian. We have read and often seen the glorious victories over death and hell. "Is this dying? How have I dreaded as an enemy this smiling friend?" cried Dr Goodwin. "The battle's fought,—the battle's fought, and the victory is won,—the victory is won for ever!" said Dr Payson. "Victory! glory! hallelujah!" were the words of another. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" 3. *This proceeding of God will never be reversed.* "Repentance shall be hid from mine eyes." God is unchangeable in his nature and promise. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. xi. 29). He never revokes what he once gave to his people. Though they sin and fall into danger, he will love and deliver them still if they call upon him. "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips" (Ps. lxxxix. 34). Alterations and after-thoughts belong to us. God dwells upon his covenant, and repeats it continually, that we may love and obey it.

Earthly Fountains of Enjoyments Fail.—*Verses* 15, 16.

The prophet had spoken of the blessings of the righteous, now he pictures the desolations of the wicked. The pomp and luxuries of sin, the glory and vanity of the world, shall perish, and leave not a wreck behind. Its springs of joy shall be dried up, and its fruitful scenes made desolate as a ruined city.

I. Earthly prosperity is a fountain which fails. "Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come," &c. Men may be planted in favourable circumstances, grow and flourish for awhile, but the "wind of the Lord" comes, and their leaves wither. Cities may be populous and powerful, but the enemy can destroy them. "Samaria shall become desolate." All fair scenes and national fruitfulness can be laid waste as the wilderness. "The treasure of all pleasant vessels" can be taken away, and the infant of days, with the women of beauty, be "dashed to pieces" by deeds of barbarity. **II. Earthly pleasure is a fountain which fails.** "His springs shall become dry." The pleasures of the

world are soon exhausted. They are shallow and deceitful; "as a stream of brooks they pass away" (Job vi. 15). As rivers roll their hasty current to the sea; so the sum of sinful pleasures ends in endless sorrow and desolation. **III. Earthly joy is a fountain which fails.** The joys which spring from domestic prosperity and success in business are soon cut up and withered at the root. "Joy hath passed me like a ship at sea," said David Scott the painter. "Folly" is always "joy to him that is without wisdom." "No joys are sweet and flourish long, but such as have self-approbation for their root, and the Divine favour for their shelter," says an old divine. If our prosperity springs from Christ, and is rooted within us, nothing can destroy it. But if it is centered in the world, and enjoyed without God, then it will be cast up by the roots, and consumed by the blasts from heaven.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

1. Often the most outwardly prosperous, by abuse of prosperity, ripen most for the judgments of God. God may be preparing the wind "from the wilderness." 2. When these judgments do fall upon them, they are the most destructive. A very great wind, "the *wind of the Lord:*" "an *east wind* shall come," which is most terrible and tempestuous. 3. Nothing will be left to defend them. Adults shall "fall by the sword," the beauty of the present, and the seed and hope of the next generation shall be cut off. Without fruitfulness in good works, springing from the Spirit of Christ, all other fruitfulness will be found as empty as the uncertain riches of the world; the wrath of God will wither its branches; the springs that watered it will become dry, and it shall be spoiled, and come to nothing. "In short, 'tribulation and anguish' belong to those who have rebelled against God, and are fixed immoveably on all who impenitently persist in rebellion; and their woes will be far more terrible than any that are experienced in that cruelty and carnage which sometimes attend the storming of populous cities. From such miseries and murders, and from sin, the fruitful parent of all sorrow, 'Good Lord, we beseech thee to deliver us'" [*Scott*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1—3. *Humility.* The more God honoureth men, the more they should humble themselves. The more bounty God shows, the more humility he requires. Humility teaches us in our works to draw strength from God, not from ourselves; in our graces to ascribe their goodness to God, and their weakness to ourselves [*Reynolds*]. Praise is a comely garment. But though thyself doth wear it, another must put it on, or else it will never sit well on thee. Praise is sweet music, but it is never tuneable in thine own mouth. If it cometh from the mouth of another it soundeth most tuneably in the ears of all that hear it [*Jermin*].

When people once fall into the habit of admiring and encouraging ability as such, without reference to moral character, they are on the highway to all sorts of degradation.

Kiss. Read the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and see if there is one exaggerating touch. That chapter is a terrible but true picture of the lower strata of humanity. What were the deities in heathen times? Jupiter was a monster, Mercury a thief, Mars a sort of cannibal, who drank the blood of his victims. Such the gods of the heathen; and like gods like people.

Ver. 4. *Thy God.* The claims of God are enforced by reference to that particular event by which the Hebrews were separated from the nations, to remind them, and the world by them, that the character of God is displayed in the agency of his providence, and that in proportion to our knowledge of that character are our obligations to him. Each individual is here addressed, that each may feel that he has means of

knowing, and constantly surrounded with motives for personally loving God.

Ver. 5. *Know thee.* This cannot mean a mere acquaintance with their condition and circumstances; for what can be hid from *him* whose understanding is infinite? But it intends two things. First: He knew them so as to provide for them. Secondly: He knew them so as to approve of them and acknowledge them. The word *know* has this meaning often. "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous" [*Jay*].

Ver. 6. *Pastures.* A curious instance of a change of instinct is mentioned by Darwin. The bees carried to Barbadoes and the Western Islands ceased to lay up honey after the first year. They found the weather so fine, and the materials for honey so plentiful, that they became exceedingly profligate, and ate up their capital, worked no more, and amused themselves by flying about the sugar-houses and stinging the negroes [*Bib. Treasury*].

Ver. 8. *Bear.* When the female is robbed of her whelps she is said to be more fierce than any other animal; hence many sayings refer to her rage, and are applied to the fury of violent men. "I will tear thee to pieces as a bear which has cubbed;" "Begone, or I will jump upon thee as a bear." When a termagant goes with her children to scold, it is said, "There goes the she-bear and her whelps" [*Roberts*]

Ver. 10, 11. *King.* Edward the Black Prince, having conquered and taken prisoner King John of France, nobly condescended to wait on his royal captive the same night at supper. Christ having first subdued his people by his grace, waits on them afterwards to the end of their lives [*Whitecross*].

Under which king, Bezonian? speak or die.
King Henry IV.

Ver. 12. *Bound up,* as indictments drawn up and tied together against the day of trial; or as bills and bonds tied up that they may be ready against the day of account, when all must be paid [*Poole*].

Ver. 14. *Triumph.* In this world, he that is to-day conqueror may to-morrow himself be defeated. Pompey is eclipsed by Cæsar, and then falls by the hands of conspirators; Napoleon conquered nearly all Europe, and was then himself conquered. But the Christian's conquest of death is absolute. The result is final. He has vanquished the last enemy, and has no more battles to fight [*Foster*]

Ver. 15, 16. The *world* has delusive charms to flatter with a face of substantial bliss, when in reality it is a fleeting shadow [*Wilson*]. I am more and more convinced of this world's tastelessness and treachery—that it is with God alone that any satisfying converse is to be had [*Chalmers*].

We should not stoop so greedily to swallow
The bubbles of the world so light and hollow;
To drink its frothy draughts, in lightsome mood,
And live upon such empty, airy food.

CHAPTER XIV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The guilt of the sinful nation and the punishment awaiting have been described: now there is a call to conversion, and a promise that God will bless abundantly. **1. Return**] Heb. intensive, expressing strong desire. **Unto**] Lit. *up to,* not merely *towards* the Lord. "Great is repentance which maketh men to reach quite up to the throne of glory," is a Jewish saying. **2. Words**] Not empty, yet outward gifts not required; only words, and these even found. **Receive**] Lit. receive the good, viz. the words of sincere repentance, given by thyself (1 Chron. xxix. 14). **Calves**] *i. e.* our lips shall be for calves. Instead of offering sacrifice we give thanksgiving and praise, the fruit of our lips (Heb. xiii. 5). **3. Save**] Israel relied upon Assyria and Egypt; now **horses** (warlike power) and **the work of our hands** (idolatry) are entirely renounced. **Fatherless**] Descriptive of Israel's condition without God; a reason for turning from idols, and an inducement to prayer (Ex. xxii. 22; Deut. x. 18). **4.**] Promise of mercy follows. First heal all injury

caused by apostasy. **Freely**] Gratuitously and with perfect spontaneity (Ezek. xvi. 60—63). "The word means *impelled* thereto by Himself alone, and so moved by His own essential bountifulness, the exceeding greatness of His goodness, largely, bountifully" [*Pusey*]. **5.**] This love will be manifest in great blessings. **Dew**] Not the early, but constant, refreshing, and enlivening dew (ch. vi. 3, 4; Prov. xix. 12; Job xxix. 19; Is. xxvi. 19); thro' which Israel will grow splendidly, deeply root itself, and spread abundantly. **Lily**] A beautiful and most productive plant. **6. Smell**] like **Leb.**, rendered fragrant by its cedars and spices (Cant. iv. 11). "The *rooting* indicates stability, the *spreading of the branches*, propagation and the multitude of inhabitants; *the splendour of the olive*, beauty and glory, and that constant and lasting; the *fragrance*, hilarity and loveliness" [*Rosenmüller*]. **7.**] Hence Israel compared to a tree. **Return**] Those forced to leave shall return and dwell in safety. Others take **His shadow**, the shadow of the Almighty (Ps. xvii. 8; xci. 1). **Revive as the corn**] Enjoy a second life and great increase. Others, will revive, *i. e.* cause the corn to grow, culture it for support. **Scent**] The fame of Israel (Cant. i. 3), like wine of *Leb.*, celebrated for aroma and flavour. **8.**] God speaks now. **Idols**] Eph., I have no longer to plead with thee, on account of idols. I have nothing more to do with them, and thou hast not. I have answered and **observed him**, *i.e.* answered and cared for him, when idols did not. I am like **a green fir**, green winter and summer alike, and whatever fruit thou yieldest, it is from me. Some represent Eph. speaking, and acknowledging its flourishing condition; but God reminds him that it is owing to his blessing. Both senses represent God as the shelter and the life of the nation. **9.**] A most important concluding lesson. **Wise**] Those who are not, cavil at God's word, and his providence to them is a complete riddle. The **prudent**—"properly gifted with understanding, the form of the word expressing that he was *endowed with* this understanding, as a gift of God"—shall know and discern. **Right**] Straight and direct, leading to the object. Ways which lead some to life and others to death, according to the attitudes which men assume towards God. The **just**, the righteous, walk in them and **live**; sinners deviate from them, stumble and perish. Moses announced to Israel that this would be the result to them (Deut. xxx. 19, 20); Paul tells us that such will be the effect of the gospel at all times (1 Cor. i. 18).

HOMILETICS.

Real Conversion to God Described.—*Verses* 1—3.

There is a change in the words of the prophet now. Wrath and threatening are past, and "sweetness and light," like the sun, burst from the dark clouds. Every word of the invitation is full of mercy, urgent upon Israel and upon all who have gone astray. God is still unchangeable and true to his covenant. There is hope for all who sincerely repent and return to him. The character of this return is clearly described in the text.

I. Its necessity. "For thou hast fallen." This is the first dawn of light upon the sinner. God discovers to him the abyss into which he has fallen. 1. He has *fallen by iniquity:* not a mere stumble, but a fall. All sin is a deep fall. A fall from God into idolatry; from holiness into guilt; from honour to disgrace. A fall from which we cannot raise ourselves. It is a pit of distress, "an horrible pit and miry clay" (Ps. xl. 2), out of which God alone can deliver us. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works." 2. He has fallen by *his own iniquity.* Nations often ascribe their calamity to civil dissension, foolish rules, and disuse of military discipline: to the cruelty of the enemy and reverse of fortune; but the fall is caused by opposition to God, and contempt of his word. Individuals blame their circumstances and their fate; but sin is their own act and deed. The fall is the result of their own conduct. The sinner eats the fruit of his own way, and is filled with his own devices. But though fallen he need not stay in his sin. The way of return is open. The invitation is given. "Return unto the Lord thy God." **II. Its nature.** "Return (up to) the Lord thy God." True conversion is abandonment of all sin and restoration to all good. 1. *Idolatry is abandoned.* "Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods." It is folly to trust to creatures which God has made. How much greater folly to adore things which we ourselves have made. The penitent renounces all idolatry, and views God as the Lord his God. Williams gives a graphic account in his missionary enterprises of the conversion of a chief from idolatry. Romatane decreed the destruction of his temples, the conflagration of his gods, and the erection of a house for God. We must not pride ourselves in monu-

ments of genius, gains of the world, and external performances in religion. Consecration to God excludes every kind of worship to strange gods. "Make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth" (Ex. xxiii. 13). 2. *Former sins are renounced.* Israel were guilty of two things—reliance upon foreign aid and upon their own warlike strength. (*a*) *Human dependence is renounced.* "Asshur shall not save us." They will betake themselves no more to an arm of flesh: for vain is the help of man. Human helps must never take the place of God. All merit and self-righteousness must be renounced. The best proof of true repentance is utter forsaking of former sin. (*b*) *Dependence upon self is renounced.* The horse was a symbol of their own, as well as foreign strength. "A horse is a vain thing for safety, neither shall he deliver any by his great strength." The strongest self-defences are nothing when most needed. Sennacherib with all his cavalry was no match for the angel of God. We must not look to creature strength, to personal merit, for salvation. "The sufficiency of my merit is to know that my merit is not sufficient," says Quarles. "Some put their trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." 3. *Entire return to God is seen.* The true penitent rises up from his fall, feels that he cannot stay in distance, and returns right up to God. Many vow and never perform, resolve and resolve again, but never forsake their sins. Others shed tears, feel desires, and take some steps towards repentance, and conclude that they are safe. The prodigal started home, did not merely turn his face, nor stop half-way; but "came to his father," up to his father's house, quite home.—Many come out of Egypt who never enter Canaan; put on garments of sorrow, who never rend their hearts and return to God. Half-conversions are unsafe; "almost a Christian" is not enough. Nothing short of actual conversion will do; an entire change is necessary. Whatever distance we travel, however high we mount in religion, if we come short of Christ we cannot be saved. "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return *unto* me" (Jer. iv. 1). **III. Its method.** "Take with you words and turn to the Lord." Words are not necessary to God. We do not induce *him* to bless us by mere words. We may argue and persuade men to grant a thing; but words without meaning are sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. 1. *Take words of confession.* God does not require costly gifts; nor burnt-offerings of goats and bullocks; but a humble and contrite heart; a full and free confession of sin. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 2. *Take words of prayer.* "Say unto him." God himself supplies the words and directs our hearts. We are sensible of inaptitude and ignorance; but he bestows the spirit of prayer, and orders our speech before him (Job xxxvii. 19). Method is helpful in everything, and the ordering of words in prayer, words marshalled like military ranks, may quicken and discipline. "Method is the soul of business." Ask for two things. (*a*) *Take away iniquity.* The true penitent is most concerned about sin, desires to be free from its consequences and dominion, to be entirely cleansed and preserved in the future. "*All* iniquity." We must not have partial zeal, but strike at all sin, great and small. *God* must take it away from our hearts and lives. We can neither remove its guilt nor destroy its power. God's grace can deliver, renew and save. "If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (*b*) *Receive us graciously.* When God has pardoned sin and imparted grace, he accepts our imperfect services. "Give what thou demandest and then require what thou wilt," says Augustine. The gifts are from God and then received by him. "For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." 3. *Take words of thanksgiving.* "So will we render the calves, *i.e.* the fruit, of our lips, giving thanks to his name" (Heb. xiii. 15). Those that receive much from God "will offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually." The expressions of the lips will spring from a grateful heart. Lip service without sincerity of heart is an abomination to God: but a holy life is a perpetual thank-offering. The sacrifices of the law are abolished; but God's good-

ness lays us under deep obligation to praise him. The penitent feels that he cannot praise too much, and resolves that the language of his lips and the fruit of his life shall be given to God. "Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince." IV. Its motive. 1. *God will hear prayer.* This we may presume, and hence the request. "Take words." But this truth is specially revealed and taught in the word of God. The grand fact which distinguishes God from heathen deities is the fact that he is accessible. "O thou that hearest prayer!" We have every encouragement and every motive to pray. "It is the first thing wherewith a righteous life beginneth, and the last wherewith it doth end. So much of our lives is celestial and divine as we spend in the exercise of prayer," writes Hooker. 2. *God will have mercy upon the miserable.* "With thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Men without God are fatherless; orphans in a sinful world. Israel was helpless, and the prey to every oppressor. The sinner forsaking God forsakes his own mercy. Christ does not leave his people orphans, or comfortless (John xiv. 18). God, "the Father of the fatherless," will have compassion on returning sinners. Men are cruel, but God is kind, and reserves his greatest mercy for greatest need. God governs not as an absolute monarch, but as a tender father. He has greater pleasure in showing his goodness than his power. "The poor committeth himself unto thee: thou art the helper of the fatherless."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. *Fallen.* The holy contrasted with the sinful state of man. Fallen in nature and condition, in pursuit and desire. God calls men to him by his prophets and his providence. "*O Israel.*" "It is well to hear when God calls through his deeds; but it is better to hear his words."

Return. 1. *The object.* "The Lord thy God,"—not to a strange god. The God of mercy, and the fountain of all good. 2. *The reason.* "Thou hast fallen." Thoughts of a fall should make us think of rising from our sad condition.

Ver. 2. *Take words.* The influence of words in prayer—1. Not necessary to inform God of our wants. 2. A means of stirring up and relieving our own hearts. Words require more exertion than thoughts, and influence our minds by their sounds. 3. Exercise a power over others often when uttered—prompts them to kindred feelings and acts, and quickens them with pathos, passion, and thought. 4. When our words accord with our hearts and the Scriptures we shall be encouraged. 5. God supplies us with words adapted to our varied feelings and necessities. Come to God with his own words. Plead help in his own promises, and you shall find it. "Men must as well look to their words, as to their feet, when they come before God; and see that their affections in prayer be not without answerable expressions in lips."

Say unto him. Mentally and vocally, with spirit and speech. Prayer is not the labour of the lips, but the travail of the heart, and God hath promised to answer his people before they call (Is. lxv. 24). By calling upon his name we neither inform him of what he knows not, nor move him to show us more mercy than he intendeth. But yet prayers are necessary, as a means which God will have used, that he may receive what he of free mercy giveth. Besides, it prepareth us holily to enjoy the things received; and makes us ready either to wait for them or to want them; and to be content, that he may be glorified, though we be not gratified [*Trapp*].

Prayer to God *to take away all iniquity*, contains a confession of sin and expresses our faith, that we place our whole hope of recovering our lost purity and of obtaining salvation in the mercy of Christ. *Receive good.* What other good can we offer, than detestation of our past sin, with burning desire of holiness? This is the burnt-offering. Lastly, *we will repay the calves of our lips*, is the promise of that solemn vow, most

acceptable to God, whereby we bind ourselves to keep in continual remembrance all the benefits of God, and to render ceaseless praise to the Lord, who has bestowed on us such priceless gifts [*Pusey*].

Ver. 3. *Fatherless.* A plea for orphans. God takes special care of them in his law (Ex. xxii. 22) and providence (Ps. lxviii. 4, 5; xxvii. 10). 1. A description of the sinner's condition Without the love, help, and guidance of a father. 2. A display of God's mercy. When earthly fathers sleep in the grave, God watches over and provides for orphan children. This should be a motive to penitence, prayer, and daily trust in God.

HOMILETICS.

Health and Divine Favour.—*Verse* 4.

In response to penitential return to God, he will heal the wounds of his people and bestow upon them the blessings of his grace.

I. We have **health.** "I will heal their backsliding." 1. *The disease.* "Backsliding." All sin is a disease; backsliding is the most dangerous. It endangers present holiness, joy, and usefulness, and imperils the future. It begins almost imperceptibly, first in the heart, then in the closet, and then in the Church. Private prayer loses its relish, spiritual enjoyments cease, and then the means of grace are neglected. As a sheep that wanders from the fold never seeks to return, so the backslider "wanders on still more and more astray," till the Divine shepherd brings him back. "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." 2. *The cure.* "I will *heal*." Apostasy is no ordinary wound, but God can heal it. (*a*) By the pardon of sin. The blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. (*b*) By removing the effects of sin. Taking away its guilt, power, and dominion; destroying the bent, the tendency within us to go back. (*c*) By restoring to all good. God himself and lost comfort are regained. The cure is *efficient.* It is restoration to perfect soundness. The cure is *certain.* "I *will* heal." God is a physician that never fails. Cases helpless and hopeless can be healed by him. Christ cured most desperate diseases, so backsliding children may be restored, "For I am the Lord that healeth thee." II. We have **Divine favour.** "I will love them." 1. *Anger is turned away!* "Mine anger is turned away from him." God is displeased with sin, but his anger will be turned away from those who repent. This is a proof and an assurance of his love. The clouds with which a guilty conscience covers God shall disperse, and sunshine beam forth in brightness and beauty again. 2. *Love is manifest.* "I will love them." (*a*) Love in *its widest scope.* "Them." Who? Moralists and worldly respectable? No! but those who have despised his authority and trifled with former mercies. Backsliders from God. (*b*) Love in *its gracious nature.* "Freely." Spontaneously and liberally, because he will love. Freely, without money and without price; freely, without inducement and without merit; freely, without reluctance and stint. (*c*) Love in *its loftiest source.* "*I* will love them." God is love—pure, unchanging benignity, the fountain, the fulness of love. A word to the sinner—God loves *thee.* A direction to the penitent—believe and return to God. To the Christian—"love so amazing, so Divine, demands thy soul, thy life, thy all."

Grace Abounding.—*Verse* 4.

This sentence is a body of divinity in miniature. The sense hinges upon the word "freely." Here is the glorious, the suitable, the Divine way by which love streams from heaven to earth. In the text we have *two great doctrines.* I will *announce, establish,* and *apply* the first.

I. The first great doctrine is this, that **there is nothing in man to attract the love of God to him.** We have to *establish* this doctrine. Our first argument

is found *in the origin of that love*. Our second, that the *whole plan of Divine goodness is entirely opposed to the old covenant of works*. Thirdly, *the substance of God's love*, clearly proves that it cannot be man's goodness which makes God love him. Remember, further, *the objects of God's love*, and we shall soon see that it could not be anything in them which constrains God to love them. We are informed in Scripture that *the love of God* and the *fruit of the love of God* are a gift. But what *practical use* of this doctrine? It offers *comfort to* those who do not feel fit to come to Christ. The text is a death-blow to all kinds of fitness and unworthiness. It *invites backsliders to return*. The text specially written for them. **II. Nothing in man can be an effectual bar to God's love.** If anything in man to bar God's grace, then this would have been a hindrance to its coming to any of the human race, it would have prevented the salvation of those undoubtedly saved, it would mar the sovereignty of God, be a great slur upon the grace of God, and detract glory from the gospel. The love of God has provided means to meet the extremest case. They are twofold—the power of Christ and the power of the Spirit *Spurgeon*].

Reviving Grace.—*Verses* 5—7.

The promise of good is continued. The supply is unfailing, and many images are given to exhibit the manifold grace of God and the results of that grace. We have refreshing influence, luxuriant growth, and social usefulness, in a sevenfold metaphor.

I. Refreshing influence. "I will be as the dew unto Israel." This is a great contrast to the desolation of sin (ch. xiii. 15). Spots most barren revive and flourish by God's blessing. The "liquid diamonds of the morn" descend on the mown grass to quicken and refresh it (Ps. lxxii. 6). Drops of dew are "fruitful nourishers of herbs and flowers." Gardens and vineyards parched with heat shall flourish again. This heavenly baptism of dew shall invigorate dying plants, renew vegetation, and beautify the garden of the Lord. "Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord" shall come, and the Church shall grow in beauty, strength, and fruitfulness. This influence will be—1. *A constant*, 2. *An efficient*, 3. *An abundant blessing*. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth." **II. Luxuriant growth.** The prophet dwells with delight and at some length on the idea of *fruitfulness*. This Divine influence is given to promote the growth of the Church. We are chosen to "bring forth fruit, and that our fruit should remain." God is "glorified" when we "bear much fruit." What God promises to give we should earnestly desire to have. 1. *Beauty in growth*. "He shall grow as the lily." The lily is the fairest of flowers. Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these plants. God seeks to make his people morally beautiful and pure in their lives. The *beauty of holiness* is comely to God and useful to man. But this beauty is *permanent*. The beauty of the lily soon decays, but that of "the olive tree" lasts for ever. What a lustre from the life of one "beautified with salvation"! His outward conduct is attractive in every part, and his inward dispositions of love and humility are well-pleasing to God himself. Man transformed into God's image is more attractive and more durable than natural beauty. "God in the redemption of the soul," says Emerson, "has solved the problem of restoring to the most original internal beauty."

> Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

2. *Rooted in growth*. "Cast forth his roots as Lebanon." There must be downward as well as upward growth. God's people must not be all foliage and profession. All spiritual growth is growth at the *root*. The root of the matter must be within, to "spread its branches," and manifest its vigour in every good word and

work. This alone can give *stability* to principle and character. The seed without root withered away (Matt. xiii. 6). We must be rooted and grounded in love (Eph. iii. 17). If only like a lily, we may be wafted by the wind, and in danger of being carried away. But if firm at the root, we shall be immovable as cedars of Lebanon, which storms of centuries could not uproot. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." 3. *Expansive in growth.* "His branches shall spread." True religion will manifest itself in open profession. It leads its possessors to come forth from obscurity, and openly confess Christ before men. "His branches," his acts and example, are seen in the family, the prayer-meeting, and the house of God. But like the trees of Lebanon, his branches widely spread, to offer shade and shelter from the burning heat and terrible storm. His religion is luxuriant and his heart expansive. He outgrows the narrowness of a creed and the boundaries of a sect. His sympathies and efforts are world-wide: his outstretched arms afford grace and protection to all. "It becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." 4. *Fragrant in growth.* "And his smell as Lebanon." This is twice mentioned, and is worthy of notice. "The scent of Lebanon's wine has a remarkable aroma." Christian influence, like the name of Christ, "is as ointment poured forth." His conversation is refreshing and delightful; his prayers are sweet odours (Rev. v. 8); and his deeds of charity are an odour of good smell (Phil. iv. 18). In proportion as a Christian lives near to God, does the smell of life reveal itself to man. "Thanks be to God which maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place." The Church shall yet revive, and be like "the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed." "How much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!" (Cant. iv. 10). **III. Social usefulness.** The corn and the vine are emblems of Christian usefulness. They are often unpromising in appearance, but revived by the genial influence of the sun and the rain, and bless others with their fruitfulness. In others restored to God there will be a revival of religion. They shall be for protection and progress. 1. *The Church blessed shall protect others.* "They that dwell under his shadow shall return." Religion is not selfishness. It is intended for others. Ministers, parents, and Sunday-school teachers have men dwelling under their shadow requiring sympathy and instruction. Where can we flee for help, in exposure and penitence, but to the people of God? If you want to do good to others, and be eminently useful in bringing them to Christ, live to him yourself, and be rich and fragrant in the odour of his grace. Live under his shadow, and others "shall return" to dwell with you. Lord Peterborough said of the home of Fenelon, "If I stay here any longer I shall become a Christian in spite of myself." 2. *The Church blessed shall contribute to the progress of others.* "They shall revive the corn." In whatever sense we take these words, the thought is this—quickened themselves, they shall quicken and advance others. They revive and cultivate everything good and useful. God's people help on, and never hinder, the progress of the world. They are greater blessings to it than corn and wine. Delivered from sin and misery, they grow to maturity, as "corn" ripens for harvest; bear fruit as "the vine," and are delightful to all around them, through example, converse, and prayer. Thus the cause of God revives in one place after another; believers ripen for heaven, and grow more useful on earth; God is glorified, and sinners are saved.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Dew. 1. The dew falls very quietly and gently. 2. The dew falls very copiously. 3. The dew is very refreshing. 4. The dew is very fertilizing. 5. The dew is very near [*Dr. Raleigh*]. *Beautiful* as the dew; shedding a glory over every common thing. *Invisible* as dew; not in thunder and power. *Penetrating* as the dew; insinuating itself into every plant on which it falls, and

maintaining its vegetative powers. 1. As dew is the purest water in nature, so the presence of God is the greatest blessing. 2. As dew is necessary to the growth and beauty of herbs and plants, so the blessing of God is necessary for the beauty of the heart and life. 3. As dew falls most copiously in the night, so God's presence is most felt in darkness and trouble.

Ver. 5. *As the lily.* 1. In *silence* as a lily. 2. In *beauty* as a lily. 3. In *purity* as a lily. 4. In *fruitfulness* as a lily.

> Happy are the pure, whose heart
> Freely blooms in every part;
> Godly acts are living gems,
> Fit for crowns and diadems.

Learn—1. That God can make his Church beautiful and pleasant. 2. That beauty and apparent excellency are worth little without root and stability. 3. That no pretence of root and stability should hinder *visible* fruits of grace. 4. That visible fruits of grace must not consist in profession or ostentation, but in living, green, and permanent deeds. 5. That a Church thus fruitful will be acceptable to God, and useful to others. 6. That it is our duty to seek these things, for God has promised to bestow them.

Christian fruitfulness is a manifold and various thing. It is not all of one kind. One life is not meant exactly to be like another life. Each is cast in its own type, and when the life is cast, the type or mould is broken. Of course it is broken, because it was composed in part of circumstances which never were before, nor ever can be again. Let *each* "planted" soul rejoice to feel rooted in him! and then let each grow freely according to his will—not fearing, but gladly daring to branch, and blossom, and fructify, according to the law of individual life. The lily! the olive tree! the corn! the vine! the cedar! all these are growing in God's garden; and there is room and dew for them all [*Raleigh*].

Types of Christian character found in the vegetable kingdom. The lily in its beauty; the olive in its greenness; the cedar in its firmness; the vine with its clusters; and the corn with its bounty; all set forth the variety and completeness of Christian character.

HOMILETICS.

God in Relation to a Converted People.—*Verse* 8.

These words represent Ephraim in his return to God; and God in his kindness to Ephraim. God has nothing to do with idols, therefore his people do not put them in competition with him; entirely renounce them; return unto him, and are accepted and blessed.

I. God attracts a converted people. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?" Once he was "joined to idols," and in the midst of Divine chastisement stupidly resolved, "I will go after my lovers." Now he renounces all former sins and depends upon God. The world has no attraction to the true convert. He forsakes his evil ways and companions; parts with everything which disputes allegiance with God; and makes no idol of opinions, parties, or means. He has been drawn to God in love and power. He turns away from the glitter which fascinates to the treasure which enriches. He envies not, he seeks not, the worldling's portion. God is all in all to him. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." **II. God accepts a converted people.** "*I*" is here emphatic. I have heard the confession and accepted it. God had hid his face before, or observed them only in his displeasure; now he watches over them and provides for them. 1. *God hears their prayers.* "I have heard him." Prayer is an indication of a change of heart. Saul was no sooner converted, than he cried, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" Angels in heaven say of such a one, "Behold, he prayeth." Prayer is the first breathing of Divine life, and then becomes "the Christian's native air." He may be despised, and considered weak in mind, or disordered in imagination, by the world: but God

regards and hears him. "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking I will hear." 2. *God delights in their character.* "And *observed* him." God is everywhere and observes all men. But more is intended here than mere observation. He is anxious about his people, cares for them and provides for them. He delights in them, and seeks to do them good. He sees the penitent a great way off, and desires his return. He knows and approves of his conduct. He is acquainted with all the remorse, the contrition, and the resolutions of the returning sinner. "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." **III. God beautifies a converted people.** He is "like a green fir-tree" unto them. The fir is tall and stately, beautiful in appearance, fragrant, and useful. Without pressing the metaphor; it pictures the constant shelter, the lasting beauty, and the perpetual life of God to the soul. Created beauty is a faint image of moral life. Christians are beautified, winter and summer; are ever fresh and ever flourishing by sap and virtue from God. God is the same to the soul at all times and in all places: the constant shade and the undying verdure of his people. In the restoration of God's image to man and the godly life of a believer we have the embodiment of "the sublime and beautiful." "He will beautify the meek with salvation." **IV. God fertilizes a converted people.** "From me is thy fruit found." Before conversion they have neither beauty, enjoyment, nor fruit in life. But God supplies all deficiency in them. He affords repast as well as repose. The fir-tree may be a shelter and evergreen, but yields no fruit. Fruit and shelter are united in God. "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." 1. *The fruit they enjoy comes from God.* In pardon and peace, in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and the foretastes of heaven: they have the earnest, the first-fruits of eternal bliss. They possess it in their hearts, but God is the source and giver. The Church is not the fountain of sufficiency; the creed not the supply of grace. In God is our joy, from God our life, and to God must be our praise. "All my springs are in thee." 2. *The fruit they produce comes from God.* Grace in the heart leads to activity in the life. We receive the gifts, but he imparts them. We repent and believe, but faith and repentance are produced by him. We obey, but he inclines and helps us. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." God therefore is the source of all fruits in this life and that which is to come. "Without me ye can do nothing." The fruits of the Spirit result from the work of the Spirit. "The fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Idols. The language expresses former attachment, present aversion and rejection. "What have I to do any more with idols?" 1. They have been a source of pain. 2. A source of shame. 3. A source of degradation. The more penitent we are, and the more we taste of God's goodness, the more useless do idols appear, and the more do we loathe former sins. "What fruit had ye in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed?"

Those who pray oftenest and secure greatest blessings will see the emptiness and vanity of everything in competition with God. "I have heard him;" therefore the response should be, "What have I to do any more with idols?"

1. God is a *protection* to his people, "like a green fir-tree." They often encounter blasts and dangers in returning to him; but he shelters them from the storm (Is. iv. 6). 2. God is a *support* to his people. Without him they are barren in their souls, and unfruitful in their lives. Support in penitence and duty springs from him. "From me is thy fruit found."

Human nature, by itself, can as little

bear fruit well pleasing to God as the pine or cypress can bear fruit for human use. As it were a miracle in nature, were these trees to bring forth such fruit, so, for man to bring forth fruits of grace, is a miracle of grace. The presence of works of grace attests the immediate working of God the Holy Ghost, as much as any miracle in nature [*Pusey*].

HOMILETICS.

The Ways of God and the Destinies of Men.—*Verse* 9.

In this epilogue the prophet sums up his teachiug, and seeks to "justify the ways of God to man." The dealings of God with men are often mysterious and difficult to understand; but are right in themselves, designed to lead to life, and will influence men according to their treatment of them.

I. The ways of God in their aspects towards men. These ways indicate the ways of Providence and the paths of duty; God's treatment of men and his requirements from them. 1. *They are right in themselves.* "The ways of the Lord are right." No fault can be found with them. (*a*) They are conformed to the will of God, which is holy and just; the standard of righteousness to the universe. (*b*) They are the most direct and straight line to a right end. They never deviate from truth and duty. They are more holy and more trustworthy than any code of morals. Invincible in power and unimpeachable in justice. "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." (*c*) They are proved to be right by our moral nature. The written word accords with the human conscience; the law without is confirmed by the testimony within. We have a sense of obligation, approve the right, though we follow the wrong. We are filled with remorse and delight. The work of the law is written in our hearts, our conscience bears witness, and our thoughts accuse or excuse us continually (Rom. ii. 15). 2. *They are difficult to be understood.* "Who is wise?" Mystery and majesty, justice and mercy, are displayed in God's providence. We are finite creatures, and should not presume to penetrate "the clouds and darkness round about him." There are "things hard to be understood" in the works as well as in the word of God. We may go forward and backward, on the right hand and on the left, and yet not perceive God (Job xxiii. 8—10). "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing" (Prov. xxv. 2). "Little can we at the beginning of any action guess at God's intention in the conclusion," says Bp Hall. "His judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out." Some are obvious and plain; written with beams of light and love; and he that runs may read. Others are obscure and beyond our comprehension. "Lo! these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him!" 3. *Yet enough may be known for the duties of life.* The question indicates that some know, that all who wish may know, and do right. "The prudent shall know them." God's ways are unsearchable to the intellectual and the theorist, but intelligible to the humble and the obedient. We know a part, and that is enough to practise. Aristotle teaches that the end of moral science is not knowledge, but practice. "Those have the best knowledge who know their duty," says Matt. Henry. "Let no man," says South, "presume that he can see beforehand into the ways of Providence. His part is to contemplate them in the past, and trust in them for the future: but so trusting, to act always upon motives of human prudence, directed by religious principles." **II. The ways of God in their requirements from men.** "Who is *wise* and *prudent?*" 1. *They require to be known.* Many have a slight acquaintance with them, but few study them. The wise alone meditate upon them and understand them. The proud and self-conceited often scoff and ridicule. A right and teachable disposition is required. "He that comes to seek after knowledge with a mind to scorn and censure, shall be sure to find enough for his humour,

but none for his instruction" [*Bacon*]. True wisdom is to understand what we have to do, and "knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth" this. A true heart and a ready mind, a single eye and a right motive, will make the path of duty easy. "If any man will" (is willing, wishes to) "do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." 2. *They require to be observed.* "The just shall *walk* in them." We are not to speculate, but to obey; not to *stand*, but walk in the way; not merely continue, but advance in it. Delay and sloth create difficulty, raise "a hedge of thorns," and harass to the end of the journey. Exertion and hope will make the way plain and prosperous (Prov. xv. 19). Wait not for louder calls and greater opportunities. "Duties are ours, events are God's." "To wait for God's performance and do nothing is to abuse that Divine providence which will always so work as not to allow us to remain in inactivity" [*Bp Hall*]. "Whoso is wise and will *observe* these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord."

Act an honest part.
Look before thee as thou goest,
Do the duty which thou knowest.

III. The ways of God in their influence upon men. "Transgressors shall fall therein." Truth will influence according to the method in which it is received. The best blessings may be perverted by malicious dispositions. "The things which should have been for his wealth become to him an occasion of falling" (Ps. lxix. 22). "Christ himself is set for the rising and falling of many" (Luke ii. 34). Hence the ways of God influence men in two methods. 1. *The righteous walk in them and live.* The wise discern their rectitude and desire to secure their end. The righteous walk in them, become like them, and live in them. There is much to discourage and oppose; but the sincere persevere in holiness, add strength to strength, and enjoy foretastes of heaven. "The righteous also shall hold" (take firm hold) "on his way, and he that is of clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." 2. *The ungodly deviate from them and perish.* If God's ways lead to life, departing from them must be death. The disobedient stumble at the word and the ways of God. They are offended at the requirements and the providence of God. They transgress, fall, and perish. This is the sum of Hosea's ministry; the fulfilment of ancient prediction (Deut. xxx. 19, 20); and the general effect of gospel preaching (1 Cor. i. 18). God's ways are just and true. Those who walk in them shall live, and those who depart from them shall perish. "Whoso readeth, let him understand."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XIV.

Ver. 2. "*Words* are the daughters of earth, and deeds are the sons of heaven."

Ver. 3. *Gods.* At the introduction of Christianity into this country, a general council was summoned to consider the new doctrines of Paulinus. All present were unanimous as to the utter inefficiency of the gods whom they worshipped. Coifi, the pagan high-priest, in an eloquent harangue proposed their overthrow, and casting aside his priestly garments, called for arms, which Saxon priests were forbidden to wield, and for a horse, which they were not permitted to mount; and thus accoutred, galloped to the shrine at Godmundham, where the chief idol stood, hurled his lance into the enclosure, and profaned the consecrated shrine. The people, encouraged by the example of their priest, destroyed the sacred temple.

Ver. 4. "We would always look hopefully at a sinner under *correction*. For surely so long as the physician administers the medicine there is no ground for despondency" [*Bridges*]. "Consumption, when it once comes to be really consumption, is beyond all doubt utterly incurable by ordinary

medicine; and though many remedies may assist the sufferer and prolong his life, yet, as a rule, consumption is the herald of death; and so backsliding is incurable by any human means, and would be the forerunner of total apostasy were it not for Divine grace" [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 5—7. "How full of beauty and poetry is this passage! There is no book so poetic in its character as the Book of inspiration. Apart from the sublimity of the matters treated and the glory of the doctrines, the style itself is enough to make the book precious to every reader. It is a wondrous book; it is the book of God: yea, as Herbert says, 'the god of books.' It is a book full of stars: every page blazes with light; from almost every sentence there beams forth some beautiful metaphor, some glorious figure" [*Spurgeon*].

Smell. Whitfield speaks of one young man who said, "I will not leave my old father's house, for there is not a chair or a table there but smells of his piety."

Ver. 9. *Providences* are sometimes dark texts, which require an expositor (Gen. xlii. 36). They that would judge aright of any one of the Lord's dispensations must be careful students of them all. They must not slight any work of his, because all, though they may be many and difficult to us, make but one entire work in God's hand. And every part of that work is a commentary, clearing the nature and use of the whole and God's intent therein [*Nisbet*].

> Just are the ways of God,
> And justifiable to men;
> Unless there be who think not God at all.

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

JOEL.

INTRODUCTION.

The Person. *Joel* (Jehovah is God), is distinguished from others of that name as "the son of Pethuel." This is the only direct notice of him; all other incidents must be gathered from his prophecy. He was commissioned to Judah, probably lived in Jerusalem, for he was familiar with the temple, priests, and ordinances of worship.

The Time. Nowhere expressly stated and cannot be fixed with certainty. He makes no allusion to idolatry. The temple service seems to be flourishing, and the only enemies mentioned are the Phœnicians and Philistines, the Edomites and Egyptians. Amos alludes to the words of Joel, which must have therefore been written and known before that time. He was probably the earliest of the prophets, and delivered his predictions in the early days of Joash, king of Judah, B. C. 870—865. His style belongs to an early date, and the time agrees with the state of things under Jehoiada, the high priest who placed Joash on the throne (2 Kings xi. 17, 18; xii. 2—16; 2 Chron. xxiv. 4—14).

The Book. The order of O. T. books not arranged according to date, but for convenience. Joel is free from local circumstances, political and geographical allusions. *Its style* is animated and finished, proves the prophet to be an accomplished man. "He has no abrupt transitions, is everywhere connected, and finishes whatever he takes up. In description he is graphic and perspicuous, in arrangement lucid, in imagery original, copious, and varied." He was accustomed to think clearly and speak logically. Ewald says that "he was in early times the highest model, so that his successors all followed his elevated precedent." He had an eye for the beautiful in nature, and in love with its wondrous scenes. He watched the ways of insects and read the lessons of the stars. Like Christ, he saw the image of the invisible God in creation, and taught us ever to reveal it in our ministry. *Its contents* most easily and naturally divided into two parts. *Part First.* Lessons of Providence; devastation by locusts; general drought and summons to repentance (chap. i.—ii. 18). The description was held to be too terrible for locusts. But naturalists and travellers have confirmed its truth, and we have no need to imagine armies or invasions to account for the destruction. "Where they swarm and descend, all vegetation instantly vanishes; they spare neither bark

nor root, much less leaf and flower. They darken the air, so that the sun and even men at a little distance become invisible. They advance in a close military array, which yields to no obstacle of stream or fire. As they advance a peculiar roaring noise is heard, like that of a torrent or waterfall." No sooner do they settle to eat, than, as Volney puts it, the grating sound of their mandibles reminds one of the foraging of an invisible army. In these calamities the prophet saw the providence of God, and a reason for national humiliation. Hence the moral lessons from these natural events. *Part Second.* Lessons for the future; deliverance from judgment and promise of fertile seasons to Israel; the day of the Lord introduced by the outpouring of the Spirit; a day of destruction to all enemies, but to the Church a day of salvation (chap. ii. 19—iii.). Joel is the prophet of judgment, the prophet of repentance, and the prophet of hope. His truths are spiritual, relate to all times, and belong to all individuals. There is a dreadful judgment before men; but they need not despair. God will save them if they repent and believe. But how is repentance possible? The Holy Spirit will bestow it and aid us to live to God. This relation deepens our responsibility before our Judge. Grace is offered, a renewed life is possible, and if we use our privileges aright, the day of judgment will be to us a day of deliverance and blessedness. Thus these doctrines form an inseparable whole; revealing God in nature and grace, predicting the Saviour, giving the Holy Spirit, and offering eternal glory to all.

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The prophecy opens with lamentation over the land, made desolate by successive swarms of locusts. Ver. 2—4 contain the spirited introduction. **Old men]** are called upon to note the unusual course of nature. **Inhabitants]** of Judah, whatever part they occupy, and whatever calamities they have witnessed, are asked to say if in their own, or in the days of their fathers, there had ever been a calamity so sweeping and so terrible. **Children]** must be impressed with a sense of national disaster, and admonished by the providence of God (Ex. xiii. 8; Josh. iv. 6, 7; Ps. lxxviii. 6, 8; ver. 4). The four names of the locusts have been thought to be four different species indicated by the etymology of the words, the *gnawer* (gâzâm); the *multiplier* ('arbeh); the *licker* (yeleq); the *devourer* (châzîl). Some critics say that *four* is the symbol of universality. **5. Drunkards]** An appeal to different classes. Wine-bibbers indulging in their favourite liquor must be roused from stupor to "*weep and howl*," though usually jolly in national calamity. **6. A nation]** Lit. some; four successive empires; symbolically others. The epithets describe their number and savage hostility. **7. Vine]** and fig-trees, common and greatly valued in the days of Solomon (1 Kings iv. 25), now destroyed. **8. A virgin]** The impersonated nation to lament with the sorrow and despair of a young girl, whose hopes have been blighted, and her beloved taken away by a stroke (Ezek. xvi. 8). **9.]** The cessation of temple service would be the greatest sorrow, and would impress the nation with a sense of Divine displeasure. **Cut off]** by locusts, who have eaten up the vine, the olive, and the wheat, for sacrificial use. **Priests]** lost not merely subsistence, but appointed offerings to Jehovah. **10. The field]** Nature sympathizing in the woes of men; the open uninclosed country and the land, Heb. rich red soil, fenced and cultivated, feel the loss. **11.]** The third appeal to husbandmen and vinedressers. Wheat and barley destroyed before their eyes; vines languish and choice fruit-trees perish. **12. Joy]** The joy of harvest withered away (Ps. iv. 7; Is. ix. 3). **13.]** A summons to repentance. **Priests]** first; they have been negligent, and must set the example of penitence. **Sackcloth]** Outward garments must indicate inward grief (Is. xxxii. 11; Jer. iv. 8). **14. Sanctify]** Set apart, hallow days of fasting. **Solemn assem.]** Lit. proclaim a *restraint*, i.e. let young and old cease manual labour to fast and pray (2 Chron. xx. 3—13). **Elders]** in office and age. **Cry]** Not a mere formal fast, but intense and earnest prayer for mercy and help. **15. The day]** of anger (Is. xiii. 9) and ill omen; evil in itself, and foreshadowing greater evils; a transition from invading locusts to the day of judgment upon all ungodly men. Present calamities are clothed in greater terror when regarded as a type of the last judgment. Joel would have the people thus to regard them. Hence present suffering should quicken to penitence and faith. **Destruction]** An aspect of the last day seen now. **16.]** Food cut off, the joy of festivals and sacrifices banished. **17. Seed]** decayed under the clods. **Garners]** Storehouses went to ruin and prospects of future harvest were blighted. **18.]** From the homestead attention is directed to the fields. **Cattle]** bewildered because the plains often cropped yield no pasture. **Sheep]** seem to mourn the guilt of man. **19.]** Beasts cry to God, but man hears not; the prophet is touched and cries for the impenitent. **To thee]** beasts even lift their heads in dumb appeal, and to thee I cry, for thou art the only hope (Is. xv. 5; Jer. xxiii. 9), amid the insensibility of man, the distress of nations, and the judgments of providence

HOMILETICS.

GOD'S MESSAGE DEMANDS EARNEST ATTENTION.— *Verses* 1—4.

Since the establishment of the kingdom Judah had seen partial and temporary judgments, but none that threatened such destruction as this fearful plague of locusts. Hence the prophet calls attention to it, and urges them to consider its design and transmit its record to posterity. Generations to come must know the judgments of God.

I. The message. "Hear *this*," recorded in ver. 4. The visitation is unparalleled and never to be forgotten in history. 1. *It was terrible.* Not a mere visit of flying insects, but a succession, plague was to succeed plague, each more destructive than its predecessor. In ordinary providences God testifies against sin. But some ages and churches are made warnings to all generations by the justice of God. God's penal resources are unlimited, and great as afflictions may have been in the past, the future may bring upon guilty sinners greater still. "Why should ye be

stricken any more?" 2. *It was unprecedented.* "Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?" Old men who could remember events years ago, accustomed to extraordinary things in nature, had never seen anything like this. Even in the days of their fathers, in the records of the nation, was there any judgment so terrible in its consequences. Neither the present nor the past generations had known such a calamity. The plague of Egypt lasted only a few days and consisted of few insects; but for multitude and mischief, this was unprecedented. "Very grievous were they; before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such." 3. *It was ever to be remembered.* "Tell ye your children of it," &c. Four generations were to note it. "This shall be written for the generation to come." National disasters live in the records of the past, and present calamities are to be fixed in the memories of the future. Greece and Rome, France and England, have each their record written in bitter experience. Woe is pronounced upon those who "regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands" (Is. v. 12). **II. The hearers.** This calamity was so striking that the attention of the present and all future generations is directed to it. 1. *Old men.* "Hear this, ye old man." "Days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom," and none are too old to learn. Men of the greatest age and ripest experience have more to learn in life, especially if their lot has fallen in grievous times. If our stock of knowledge be not increasing it is wasting. All should *hear* the voice of judgments. "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels." 2. *All the inhabitants of the land.* Lest any should escape, all the people are urged to give earnest attention. What concerns one concerns all. *None* like to hear evil tidings, but they must be pressed upon men sometimes. When God speaks, when vital interests are at stake, all should hear. "Hear this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world." 3. *Children of another generation.* God's dealings with the present age have a relation to the future. The events of one nation are lessons to all nations. Whatever concerns humanity concerns all men. Generation must declare to generation the wonders of God's love and the might of his judgments. Our woes must be warnings to posterity, and our corrections their instructions (1 Cor. x. 6). If the memory of God's love does not stir up to gratitude, the memory of woe must entreat them to repentance. "Take heed to thyself, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen; but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons" (Deut. iv. 9; vi. 6, 7; xi. 19). **III. The purpose.** The present generation must hear and the future be taught for a wise purpose. People are negligent, persist in sin, and bring punishment upon themselves. Hence they must be taught,—1. *That God watches over men's conduct.* This fact is constantly impressed upon our minds by God's ways in providence and in creation. Men cannot sin and defy the visitations of God with impunity. Our children may learn this lesson, future generations may read it in our history without our experience. 2. *That God directs the events of history.* All events are under his control and are overruled for the fulfilment of his will. Yet men "regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands" (Ps. xxviii. 5). Israel forgot God in his dealings with them. Even at the Red Sea, amid the greatest displays of mercy and judgment, they could not discern him (Ps. lxxviii. 11; cvi. 13). 3. *That God warns men of their danger.* Those who forget God's works are in great danger, and have need of Divine teaching. Israel was a favoured nation, a standing testimony of God's truth and existence to idolatrous peoples. Israel's sufferings were a warning to all nations to avoid Israel's guilt. God designs to educate the world in the knowledge of his love and power. The lessons are given to one man to relate to another, written in the experience of one age that another may be impressed; "that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. It is a mercy that God reveals his word to the Church, when he is about to inflict punishment upon it. This word is not to be sought in wild fanatic spirits, but in chosen servants of God. *The word of the Lord that came to Joel.*

Individuality merged in Divine commission. Little known of the birth, life, and deeds of Joel. Some known by personal service rather than personal history—David's mighty men. Others content to live and act in obscurity, and wish to be known only by efforts to save the souls of men.

Ver. 2. *Hear* God's word addressed to all classes. 1. The common dangers of men. 2. The common needs of men. 3. The common privileges of men. Take heed how ye hear.

Ver. 3. *Tell your children.* Parental duty. 1. A necessary duty. 2. A personal duty. 3. A solemn duty. 4. A duty commanded by God (Deut. vi. 7). As far as life and means permit we must prepare for the instruction of the future youth, and transmit the doings of God by succeeding families. The word of God is for this and every age. The doctrines of that word are not effete, but adapted to our wants, and will exert an influence as long as the race shall last.

1. God's word explains God's providence, that we may know the author, cause, and design of our affliction. 2. What we learn in the school of providence we should transmit to posterity. "That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children" (Ps. lxviii. 6).

I. What is to be told? *This*, i.e. the judgments of God upon Israel. II. To whom are they to be made known? (*a*) Your children. (*b*) Their children, and (*c*) Another generation. Four generations are to keep up the remembrance. III. How are they to be known? "*Tell*, Heb. cipher them up diligently, after the manner of arithmeticians; reckon up the several years with the several calamities thereof to your children and nephews, that they may hear and fear, and do no more so" (Deut. xix. 20).

Family Religion. I. The fathers' knowledge the children's heritage. II. The fathers' fall the children's preservation [*Treasury of David*].

HOMILETICS.

National Calamities.—*Verses* 4, 6, 7.

These verses set forth that terrible calamity which was coming upon a land which God once protected and blessed, but which was devastated by a nation of savage and innumerable hosts.

I. Calamities by diminutive creatures. In one sense nothing is insignificant in the hands of God. "A fly with God's message could choke a king," says Jeremy Taylor. Armed with his vengeance, the meanest creatures become the mightiest. In the East so proverbial is the power of the locusts, that the insects are made to say to Mahomet, "We are the army of the great God; we produce ninety-nine eggs; if the hundred were completed we should consume the whole earth and all that is in it." "In every stage of their existence," says Dr Thompson, "these locusts give a most impressive view of the power of God to punish a wicked world." All creatures are under God's control. The lion from the forest and the wind from heaven do his bidding. Hosts of angels and swarms of insects can punish a guilty people. II. Calamities in dreadful succession. Whatever time intervened, calamity followed calamity, each destructive, but all together most terrible in their consequences. Travellers tell us that swarm succeeds swarm, darken the sun, extend hundreds of miles, and devour every green thing. Volney says that "the quantity of these insects is a thing incredible to any one who has not seen it himself." The judgments of God are often linked together like a chain, each one draw-

ing on the other. Yet, says one, "at each link of the lengthening chain, allowing space and time for repentance to break it through." If men like Pharaoh harden their hearts they will be destroyed. "By executing thy judgments upon them by little and little thou gavest them place of repentance, not being ignorant that they were a naughty generation" (Wisd. xii. 10). **III. Calamities most destructive.** 1. *Fierce as a lion.* "Whose teeth are the teeth of a lion," &c. Nothing can resist their bite. "They gnaw even the doors of houses," says Pliny. The sharp and prominent eye-teeth of the lion and lioness are ascribed to them. "They appear to be created for a scourge," says a traveller, "since to strength incredible for so small a creature they add saw-like teeth, admirably calculated to eat up all the herbs in the land." 2. *Destructive to all vegetation.* One feature is presented after another in a way to rouse attention. (*a*) All tender *herbs* were destroyed. What was left by the palmer-worm was eaten by the locust; "and that which the locust hath left hath the canker-worm eaten; and that which the canker-worm hath left hath the caterpiller eaten." (*b*) Choice *fruit trees*, such as vines and fig-trees, were destroyed. The vine is most prominent as the more noble and valuable tree. It flourished from time immemorial, was most fruitful, and a source of wealth to the people. These were *the* trees of Judea, and to have them destroyed was a calamity not common to a people whose common drink was wine. (*c*) Desolation was extreme. Young shoots and even the bark of trees were not spared. Drooping vines and injured fig-trees, with their leafless branches and peeled bark, were effects of wasting plagues for many years. This picture is not exaggerated in the least. It is fearfully accurate, and an awful symbol of the desolation of churches and nations caused by sin. The Christian Church is God's vineyard. If it yields not fruit, it may be laid waste. Prevailing sins will be visited by corresponding judgments. How great must be that guilt which leads God to punish his own land! "I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns."

A SOLEMN WARNING TO DRUNKARDS.—*Verse* 5.

All classes are called upon to repent. The wine-bibbers are to wake up to a recognition of the hand of God, to "weep and wail," for the judgment has touched what they most love. Drunkenness is the greatest curse of this land, and the greatest hindrance to the gospel. In a community educated, wise, and pious, it is a source of powerful mischief; but among the masses of mankind, governed by appetite and not intelligence, it has been terribly destructive.

I. **Drunkards frustrate the design of nature.** Whatever produce of the earth is fit for food is placed at man's disposal. He should co-operate with God in the laws of providence, for the growth and increase of this food. All waste in nature is condemnable. Yet the sole end for which some cultivate the fig-tree and the vine, the garden and the farm, is selfish indulgence. Nature's gifts are abused, and the benevolent design of God is nullified and reversed. Drunkards virtually say concerning fruit and grain, "To me they shall *not* be for meat." **II. Drunkards render themselves insensible to danger.** "Awake, ye drunkards." All sin stupefies; but drunkenness intoxicates the mind, lulls the conscience, hardens the heart, and turns into society a sordid, selfish animal. This delirium is the most solemn feature of the case. The victim having lost all sensibility and will, has no power to awake, and sleeps quietly like one "lying down in the midst of the sea, or upon the top of the mast." The senses even seem stupefied. He may be "stricken and beaten," but he feels it not (Prov. xxv. 35), more senseless than the brute who satisfies nature, not lust; he is lost to shame, enslaved by appetite, and seeks relief from temporary awakening, by yielding himself again to his ruinous sin. "When shal I awake? I will seek it yet again."—

> **With ceaseless, ravenous, and remorseless rage,**
> **By day and night—on Sabbath and on work day,**
> **The monster feeds and feasts and fattens on its prey.**

III. Drunkards will be roused from sottish slumber. "For it is cut off from your mouth." Locusts were to destroy the vines, the grapes would cease to grow, and the sweetness and strength "of the new wine" would be taken from them. "Take away my wine, you take away my life," said one. God will deprive men of idolized indulgence, and force them to "weep and howl" by his judgments. The more inordinately they lust, the more pinching will be their distress. "A wilful waste will bring a woeful want." If temporal sufferings do not rouse the drunkard, the epicure, and the sensualist to a sense of their sin and danger, what must be their feelings when weeping and howling will be without hope and intermission? Let weeping for things temporal beget care not to lose things eternal. "For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red: it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them."

NATIONAL LAMENTATION.—*Verses* 8—10.

The second appeal is to the impersonated nation, clothed in sackcloth, and weeping for her lord, which death has taken away. The land is desolated, public worship is interrupted, and the temple forsaken by God and man. The nation's hope is cut off, and she is left as "a virgin" to lament in passionate grief and utter despair.

I. The character of this lamentation. "Like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth." Between young persons that are married or about to be married there is great love, and therefore great grief when separated by death. Virgin love is purest and most sincere. "She must weep or she will die." The affections in youth are strongest and most capable of resentment. "I remember thee, the kindness of thy *youth*, the love of thine *espousals*" (Jer. ii. 2; Is. lxii. 5). The Church unfaithful to her Lord and Master, the professor who gives his heart to the world, will lose the protection and blessings of Christ, our Divine Head and Redeemer. The more wedded to the creatures the more bitter their loss. It is not mere conventional grief that God commands, but that of one who has lost all joy and who clothes herself with penitence—

> Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak
> Whispers the o'er-fraught heart, and bids it break [*Shakespere*].

II. The reason of this lamentation. 1. *The land is devastated.* "The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted." The cultivated and the open lands were unproductive. The luxuries and the necessities, the corn and the wine: bread that strengthens man's heart, wine that maketh glad the heart, and oil to make his face to shine, were all taken away (Ps. civ. 15). Nature shouts and sings for joy under the benediction of God (Ps. lxv. 13); the valleys are covered with corn and all is vocal with praise. But under man's sin creation mourns in sorrow and casts off its beauty and fruitfulness; "groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom. viii. 22). "How long shall the land mourn and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein" (Jer. xii. 4)? 2. *The temple was forsaken.* The locusts devoured the vine, the olive, and everything that constituted the meat and drink offerings in the house of God. (*a*) *Forsaken by God;* for God was supposed to have forsaken the temple when the altar was not duly furnished. He was offended at the nation, and could not dwell with a sinful people. (*b*) *Forsaken by men.* The priests could no longer present the accustomed offerings. Public worship was suspended. The temple is the residence of God. Divine worship must be kept up in due order and regular time. On the continuance of our morning and evening service depends the continuance of God's presence with us. Suspend the one, we suspend the other. Terrible must be that scourge which robs us of the benefits of Divine ordinances, and drives God from his own temple; when "joy and gladness are cut off from the house of the Lord." III

The extent of this lamentation. 1. *The priests mourned.* "The priests, the Lord's ministers, mourn." Some would *spiritually* lament the suspension of God's offerings. True ministers feel deeply the ungodliness of men; set the first example of penitence and confession; and mourn greatly interrupted fellowship with God. Others mourn *naturally* for the loss of their perquisites and the means of self-indulgence. When the house of God is forsaken and holy communions become rare, the ministers of the sanctuary should mourn. 2. *The nation mourned.* Priest and people, rich and poor, were to lament the judgments that had fallen upon them. Vegetation had languished, the land was ravaged, and the temple forsaken. Judea was to lament like a virgin, and all were to bow to the dust in sackcloth and ashes. "In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 9. Poverty and Religion. 1. Poverty the result of sin. 2. Poverty bringing Divine judgments. 3. Poverty prejudicial to public worship. "Want of means of livelihood must exert a very prejudicial influence on the public service of God. Under the old economy there would be of necessity a failure of tithes and offerings. So now, when people have a hard and constant struggle for the bare means of subsistence, they will be far behind others in knowledge of the truth, in the proper training of children, and in mutual love [*Lange*].

Ver. 10. What reason we have to praise God for bountiful seasons, and for his goodness in filling our hearts with food and gladness! But cleave not too closely to temporal blessings, which may be cut off by judgment, and taken suddenly away. God takes from an ungodly people the means of gratifying their lusts, and will bring them to repentance by deep afflictions. The prosperity of the Church depends not on a grand ceremonial, or crowds of admiring devotees, or the countenance of the State, however desirable these things may be, but only on the favour of God, whose blessing and whose Spirit will be withdrawn, if we defile his sanctuary with superstitious rites [*Robinson.*]

HOMILETICS.

Disappointed Husbandmen.—*Verses* 11, 12.

The next picture is a group of husbandmen and vine-dressers, pale and sick in disappointed toils. Wheat and barley the most important field crops; the vine, fig, and pomegranate, the choice fruit-trees of the land, were destroyed. The date-palm, "which has neither a fresh green rind, nor tender juicy leaves, and therefore not easily injured by the locusts," and all other trees wither away. Joy is turned into shame, labour is lost, and mourning results.

I. Wasted labour. "The harvest of the field is perished." The husbandman ploughs, sows, and labours in hope. He waits "for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." Between seed-time and harvest there is a time of trial, an opportunity for faith. In all true labour we must expect fruit, and receive it as the precious gift of God. But unsuccessful labour will shame our skill and faith, and confound our hopes. Sin will prevent results, and God will blight our harvests. 1. *Husbandmen will be disappointed in anticipation.* 2. *Vine-dressers will be robbed of choice fruits.* "The ground was chapt, for there was no rain in the earth, the plowmen were ashamed, they covered their heads" (Jer. xiv. 3, 4). **II. Withered joy.** "Because joy is withered away." The loss of harvest is the withering of joy and enjoyments. 1. *The joy of men is withered.* "Withered away from the sons of men." The joy that depends upon the creature is uncertain and unsatisfactory. Those that place happiness in the delights of sense may be deprived of them. Wine and oil may

delight, but not satisfy; they have their vacuity and indigence. All outward comforts sooner cloy than cheer, and weary than fill. Christ in the heart is better than harvests in the barn and wine in the vat. "It is better," says one, "to feel God's favour one hour in our repenting souls, than to sit whole ages under the warmest sunshine that this world affordeth." "Nature's common joys are common cheats." 2. *The joy of nature is withered.* Joel again declares the sympathy of nature with man. "The trees of the field are withered, *because* (for) joy," &c., as if it were impossible for the natural world to rejoice when the hearts of men were sad and sinful. Poets in all ages have taught "that one life beats throughout the universe, revealing itself in subtle and manifold interchanges of sympathy; that therefore Nature feels with her foster-child man, rejoicing when he rejoices, weeping when he weeps." Scripture shows that sin may turn a paradise into a wilderness, and "a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein" (Ps. cvii. 34). What a picture of demoralization, sensuality, and judgment in the language of Isaiah! "All the merry-hearted do sigh. There is a crying for wine in the streets, all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone."

MINISTERS OF THE SANCTUARY AN EXAMPLE OF PENITENCE AND PIETY IN THE DAY OF CALAMITY.—*Verses* 13, 14.

The fourth call is to priests of the temple, who are first to humble themselves in private as a preparation for public confession. A fast must be appointed, and they must lead the princes and people in solemn prayer before Almighty God. When judgment begins at the house of God, penitence should begin also, for priests are often the first and greatest cause of sorrow.

I. They must mourn for sin. "Lament" and howl. In all true penitence there will be a due sense of guilt. Physical evil may cause sorrow, the destruction of vegetation and vineyards may create lamentation; but moral evil compels us to feel guilty; and justice cries for punishment. 1. *Mourn in sackcloth.* "Gird yourselves." Outward garments are of no avail without inward contrition. We must rend our hearts, not our garments. Yet by outward acts we must incite others, testify our abject condition before God, and renounce all carnal customs and delights. "For this gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl; for the fierce anger of the Lord is not turned back from us." 2. *Mourn continually.* "Come, lie all night in sackcloth." Day and night was the temple service. So there must not be occasional grief, but lamentation without intermission. Guilt often disturbs the sleep of night, and men lie not at ease, but in sorrow. Instead of going to rest and employing the night in Psalmody, many have more reason to confess their sins and deprecate the wrath of God. "All the night make I my bed to swim: I water my couch with tears." 3. *Mourn with others.* All classes, the princes, and elders, and all the people, were to mourn universally. Chiefs in authority, and elders in sanctity and grey hairs, were to form one band and lament with one heart and voice. The example of old men must stimulate the young to repentance; and the authority of priests must urge others to the fear and worship of God. All had contributed to national guilt, all were equally exposed, and all must join together in national humiliation. The more public and prevalent, the more pleasing and acceptable to God is national sorrow. "Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God and wept, and sat there before the Lord" (Judg. xx. 26; 2 Chron. xxx. 3; Jon. iii. 5, 7, 8). II. They must sanctify a fast. "Sanctify ye a fast." 1. *Universal cessation from labour.* The day must be fixed, set apart and solemnly observed. "Proclaim a restraint," let manual labour cease, and hallow the fast with acts of devotion and fruits meet for repentance. No servile work must be done, the time must be consecrated, like the Sabbath, not to eating, and drinking, and seeking pleasure, but to supplication and obedience. 2 *Universal worship.* The elders and all the inhabitants were to assemble in the house of God. England did well to observe a day of thanksgiving for the restora

tion of the Prince of Wales. What a spectacle to continental nations! Fasting without devotion was only a form of sorrow. Festive joys must give place to religious worship. Fasting must be connected with the mortification of the flesh, the contrition of the spirit, and humiliation in the house of God. Here all were commanded to repair to confess their guilt and obey their laws. The house of God is the house of prayer; the place in which he has put his name, and the centre of Divine influence and Christian friendship. Here the world loses its charms, trials are forgotten, the mind is elevated, and sympathies "meet and mingle into bliss." "I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually" (1 Kings ix. 3). "What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, in this house. Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place" (viii. 38; 2 Chron. vi. 33). 3. *Universal supplication.* "And cry unto the Lord." (*a*) *Supplication must be united.* All must not merely be present, but all must join together in prayer. Attendance must be devout, the time must be spent before God, not in gazing at men. United prayer has power with God and influence upon men. It is thus that heaven is taken by violence and national calamities averted. (*b*) *Supplication must be earnest.* "*Cry* unto the Lord." It is not a listless, irreverent prayer, but a loud earnest *cry*. No formal customary supplication will suffice; the distress is great, the routine of life and worship must be disregarded, and the "cry" must be with impassioned earnestness and repetition. Cold prayers are a mockery and never climb to heaven. "So long as the light shines bright and the fires of devotion and desires flame out," says Jeremy Taylor, "so long the mind of a man stands close to the altar and waits upon the sacrifice; but as the fires die and desires decay, so the mind steals away and walks abroad." We are taken from the fields to the sanctuary in this picture. A train of priests, clothed in sackcloth and worn with vigils, stand between the porch and the altar, weeping and making supplication to God; a large assembly, led by the elders, gather round them, bend their heads in passionate grief, and unite in earnest cry for mercy and deliverance. Priest and peasant, kings and princes, old and young, bow in confession, petition, and humiliation before their Maker, and thus own their dependence and set an example to others. "Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord."

The Terrible Day.—*Verse* 15.

The prophet urges them to repentance by fresh motives and more calamities. Judgments had fallen upon the city and the field, in the temple and the vineyard. Hints are now given at the truths typified by the plagues. Trouble is not only at a distance but near. So great is this trouble that men will cry, "*Alas for the day!*"

I. This day is a day of terror. 1. *On account of the evils which attend it.* (*a*) The chastisement of God's people for their sins. What can people expect but desolating strokes when they continue to sin? "In the day of adversity consider." (*b*) The destruction of sinners for their guilt. All the enemies of God's kingdom will be destroyed. "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate, and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it" (Is. xiii. 6, 9). (*c*) The desolation of the land (ver. 10—12). 2. *On account of the evils which it predicts.* "As a destruction from the Almighty shall it come." In every judgment almighty power is seen. *This* aspect of the day was seen in present events. Vegetation was consumed, and the face of nature blackened by fire; flocks and herds roamed disconsolate over wasted fields; food was cut off before the eyes of the people, and joy and gladness departed from the house of God. But present calamities predicted *greater* evils to come—evils beyond description, displays of power never seen before. "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it; it is even the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer xxx 7). II. This day is near

"The day of the Lord is at hand." Sinners put evil days far away, and think they will not come. "Evil tidings to-morrow," said one in festive joy. The word of God declares that they are present and pressing—that it is folly to delay repentance, and that judgments may fall suddenly upon men to overwhelm them (Ecc. ix. 12; Is. xxviii. 15). The antediluvians disregarded the warnings of Noah, and were swept away by the flood. Men now cry, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Some put off the day in a sort of philosophic argument. "The course of nature has remained the same for ages, and therefore not likely to change." Others live in stolid indifference, quench their forebodings of evil, and deceive themselves by lies. Alas, some change the threatened vengeance into mirthful jest, and ridicule the devout anticipations of the godly. "The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of." III. This day should be regarded by men. Destruction from the Almighty *shall* come. There is no uncertainty, no delay. In this light the prophet regarded and desired the people to regard the day. Present adversity should quicken us to a profound sense of the moral government of God, to continual recognition of his purpose in life, and to live so that we may escape the dangers of that eventful day. Heed not the sneering infidelity of the times. Go to your beds to-night, enter upon your duties to-morrow, as in sight of the judgment-seat. Live daily under the powers of the world to come. Grow in love for the appearing of Christ. The promise will not fail. "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.'

The Day of Judgment.

I. The day of judgment written in the convictions of men. Natural theology teaches a retributive providence. The writings of the heathen are full of ideas of God as a God of justice. Retributive justice was made a separate deity, whose awards would only be full and perfect in a future life. There is a sense of future judgment in the heart. Every sin committed carries with it a monition, a prediction of this judgment. The idea is inwrought in the consciousness of mankind, and clearly taught in the writings of ancient philosophy. Seneca says, "The good man God accustoms to hardships, and prepares him for himself. But the luxurious, whom he seems to indulge and to spare, he reserves for evils to come. For you are mistaken if you think any one excepted. The man who has been long spared will at last have his portion of misery; and though he seems to have escaped it, it is only delayed for a time." "Thus ought we always to believe," says Plato, "those ancient and sacred words, which declare to us that the soul is immortal, that judges are appointed, and that they pass the highest sentences of condemnation when the spirit is separate from the body." Thus it is a dictate of natural religion, that the future state will be one of misery to the wicked. The day of the Lord is foreshadowed in our moral constitution. All men fear it and all men believe it. It is a mark of the Divine origin and moral nature of man, which nothing can destroy. "That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them." II. The day of judgment prefigured in the events of history. The judgments of God, extreme and awful, have even been regarded by the darkest minds as evidences of God's anger against sin, and his determination to punish it. Heathen seers and Jewish prophets bid us regard the inner meaning of calamity and look at it, in some sense as a part and prediction of another. The vicissitudes of life, the unequal conditions of men, and the providences of God, point to a day when all things will be rectified and each one receive his due. Each particular judgment is a warning of its approach and a pledge of its certainty. Present chastisements must be viewed as steps in a progressive plan, realized in the final

day; the beginning and the anticipation of "the day of the Lord." The history of the world, through the government of God, is turned "into a continuous judgment, which will conclude at the end of this course of the world with a great and universal act of judgment, through which everything that has been brought to eternity by the stream of time unjudged and unadjusted will be judged and adjusted once for all, to bring to an end the whole development of the world in accordance with its Divine appointment, and perfect the kingdom of God by the annihilation of its foes." "All these are the beginning of sorrows." **III. The day of judgment predicted in Scripture.** What is rendered possible by the creed of the atheist, and probable from the teachings of nature, is morally certain from Divine revelation. Scripture confirms natural theology in this respect, and teaches distinctly that God designs to impress upon our minds that he will by no means clear the guilty, but reserve them to the day of punishment. The judgments of God are said to have happened as examples, warnings to us to repent of the sins and avoid the dangers which brought them on. Earnest and emphatic declarations are given in Old and New Testaments. "He hath prepared his throne for judgment. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness." "He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained." "For we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ."

Great National Calamities.—*Verses* 16—18.

As a proof that the day of the Lord is approaching the prophet sets in detail the judgments that were upon the land. Present prospects were cut off, all future hope frustrated, rotten seed, withered fruits, and desolate land, cause man and beast to mourn.

I. Human sustenance taken away. "Is not the meat cut off before your eyes?" When the fruits were ripe, the corn ready for the reaper, and the grapes longing to be pressed; when everything was set before their eyes for their enjoyment, they were taken away. God can easily disappoint our expectations. Meat is often cut off from our eyes by sin. True sustenance is in God and in his word. Man's life, even his physical life, is not dependent for its continuance upon bread alone. God has but to will to the subject elements, material and spiritual, and any other means will suffice, as well as bread, to sustain life. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." **II. Festive joy cut off.** "Joy and gladness from the house of our God." Pinched by famine, the offerings for the priest and the temple had perished. Annual feasts and national thanksgivings had departed. The joy, all the deeper because it was "the joy of the Lord," the gladness, all the more pure and sweet because it was "gladness in the house of their God," had ceased perforce. How sad to be deprived of necessary food and the ordinances of God's house! When the body is not fed the mind will starve, the morals will suffer. As the brain depends upon the blood for its nourishment, so the soul depends upon God for its health. He imparts to those who love him a joy of exuberance in all the good things of life. None are poor but those who sin and despise the warnings of God's providence. "The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish; but he casteth away the substance of the wicked." **III. National drought prevailed.** The land greatly suffered, cattle and herds were distressed, and groaned out their life through want of pasture. 1. *The cattle suffered.* "How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed." Touch after touch is given. Not only do men suffer, but innocent cattle groan who depend upon their care. The herds of oxen find the oft-cropped plains destitute of pasture. The sheep, which can feed where herds cannot, wander in their pitiful distress and bleat in vain. "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled. thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust." 2. *The homesteads were destroyed.* "The barns are broken down." It is not enough to lose

joy and mirth. The very "seed is rotten under the clods." The prospects of the harvest are destroyed. Vegetation and grass, smitten by the burning sun, have withered. The husbandmen despair, and suffer their "barns" to break down, and their "garners" to become heaps of ruins. Thus one mischief is heaped upon another. All nature is touched in sympathy and robed in mourning for man's guilt. "Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field and with the fowls of heaven" (Hos. iv. 3).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

The husbandman was called to mourning for a threefold calamity that lay upon his tillage (Amos v. 16). First, immoderate rain in or about seeding; secondly, locusts and other vermin at spring; thirdly, extreme drought after all (ver. 19, 20). Thus God followeth sinners with one plague in the neck of another (as he did Pharaoh, that sturdy rebel), till he has made his foes his footstools. To multiply sin is to multiply sorrow (Ps. xvi. 4); to heap up wickedness is to heap up wrath (Rom. ii. 5) [*Trapp*].

Let us here recall the fact, that it is the Spirit of God who speaks by the mouth of his prophet; for it is to be feared that we do not make enough of *the humanity* of God, of his intense delight in trees and flowers, in herds and flocks; of his humane care for them, of his tender sympathy with them. The Psalms and Prophecies are full of this Divine humanity, no Prophecy fuller, perhaps, than that of Joel; and in no passage of Joel's is that tender, intense humanity more beautifully and pathetically expressed than in the verses (18—20) we have just considered [*Cox*].

HOMILETICS.

STUPIDITY IN NATIONAL CALAMITIES REPROVED BY BRUTES AND GOOD MEN.—*Verses* 19, 20.

The fact that irrational creatures suffer with man should make him cautious in his conduct. If the people neglect the warnings of the prophet, they should heed the cries of the brute creation. Both the animal and vegetable world are included in man's destiny for good or for evil. Should we be silent when beasts implore help?

I. **Some men are insensible to sin in great national calamities.** The drought had consumed the pastures of the field, burned the trees of the forest, and dried up the waterbrooks, but Israel did not see the hand of God in this. Man is a creature of emotion, and is bound to acquaint himself with all the phenomena calculated to move him; to estimate them according to their design, and to carry out the emotions which they produce into final acts. Every object is adapted to produce a certain state of mind. The hand of God in history, the judgments of God in nations, should be read and observed by us. If we discern not the presence of God, if through selfishness and hardness of heart we despise the chastisements of God, we aggravate our sin and unbelief. God has placed us in certain relations to himself and his works as sentient and intelligent beings. We have capacities higher than brutes, can see and hear God in his dispensations, and live habitually under a sense of duty. But the complaint is often made, "Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." "For God speaketh once, yea, twice, yet man perceiveth it not." II. **This insensibility to sin in great national calamities is censurable.** Men *ought* to feel in distress. If they do not they violate their own nature and disregard the voice of God. 1. *Brutes reprove insensible men.* "The beasts of the field cry also unto thee." They depend upon God, and he gives them their meat in due season (Ps. cxlv. 15). When young lions lack and suffer hunger, they "seek their meat from God" (Ps civ. 21). They enjoy the gifts of nature

with sensitive pleasure and apparent gratitude. But men are heedless of their groans, stupid in their folly, and turn not to God in their trouble. "The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of God." 2. *God's people reprove insensible men.* The prophet stirs them up by his own example. If no one else will call upon God, "O Lord, to thee will I cry." When others are unmoved God's people are touched with national calamities. They set others an example, and seek to provoke them to repentance and return to God. 1. *An example of penitence.* The heart of the prophet was deeply moved for innocent creatures and for ungodly men. We hear his sighs, see his tears, and dwell upon his words. He comes before us, an embodiment of the spiritual and personal duty he teaches. He is the prophet of repentance, and sees in the judgments of God motives to repentance. National sins brought national affliction, and should cause national humiliation. 2. *An example of patriotism.* God's people are as keenly alive to the interests and dangers of the nations as others. The Hebrew prophets were patriots and statesmen, to whom nothing that affected the national welfare was alien or indifferent. "May Heaven save my country," cried a British legislator. So good men see God in everything; point out the real causes of suffering; the operation of moral under physical law; and lament the state of the country and the condition of the people. "For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, and for the habitations of the wilderness a lamentation, because they are burned up, so that none can pass through them; neither can men hear the voice of the cattle." 3. *An example of prayer.* The prophet turned to God, our only hope in distress. In public calamity men write pamphlets, make speeches, and enact laws to meet and overcome it. But the man of God goes to the root of evil, and points out its only cure. He holds the principles of Divine life in his soul, believes that individual circumstances and national events are controlled by God's will, and sees in present visitations the future results to the wicked and the righteous. God was working out his mysterious purposes, and he prays that the visitations of anger may be turned into corrective discipline. As Abraham prayed for the cities of the plain and Moses for the tribes of Israel, so Joel betakes himself to Jehovah. "O Lord, to thee I will cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness."

> Lord, what a change within us one short hour
> Spent in thy presence will prevail to make,
> What heavy burdens from our bosoms take;
> What parched grounds refresht as with a shower!
> We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;
> We rise, and all—the distant and the near—
> Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear—[*Trench*].

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There is an order in these distresses. First he points out the insensate things wasted; then those afflicted, which have sense only; then those endowed with reason; so that to the order of calamity there may be consorted an order of pity, sparing first the creature, then the things sentient, then things rational [*Pusey*].

Beasts cry. I. The dependence of all creatures upon God. II. The compassion of God to all creatures—1. In removing their sufferings. 2. In supplying their wants. An argument against cruelty to animals and a motive to prayer. If God hears the cries of dumb animals will he not hear our prayers?

The double purpose of Divine judgments upon a nation—1. Restoration of land. 2. Improvement of men.

1. *A suffering world in sympathy with suffering man.* What a mystery man's sin, desolating the land, blighting the trees, and adding to the groans of the brute creation! The whole creation,

animate and inanimate, touched by the fall of man! What evidences of sin! What motives to repentance! 2. *A beneficent world in sympathy with restored man.* A cheering thought that true penitence and restoration to God will give pasture to flocks, beauty to flowers, and freshness to the landscape. "New heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1—4. The Jewish theocracy is passed away, but God is still the moral governor of the world; and in perfect harmony with the principles of the New Testament, which teach us not to pronounce a man to be a sinner above other men, because on him the tower of Siloam falls, we may interpret the prevalence of natural evils in any country as meant by God to call the attention of the people to those moral evils which abound amongst them. So that if untimely weather come, or malignant diseases come, or any form of calamity come;—if people ask one another, "Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Did you ever know such a season, such weather, such sickness, or such death?"—it is only the province of religious duty to look on such things as the working out of great laws, of moral righteousness;—to recognize man's sin as the awful fact lying under what man calls his misfortunes, and by timely repentance to secure forgiveness; and thus turn the visitation into a blessed chastisement [*Stoughton*].

Ver. 4, 6, 7. *Locusts.* The insect that destroyed all the peach-trees in St. Helena was imported from the Cape, says Kirby and Spence. "We know," says Burke, "that a swarm of locusts, however individually despicable, can render a country more desolate than Gengis Khan or Tamerlane. When God Almighty chose to humble the pride and presumption of Pharaoh and bring him to shame, he did not effect his purpose with tigers and lions. He sent lice, mice, frogs, and everything loathsome and contemptible, to pollute and destroy the country."

Ver. 5. *Drunkards.* Be sober in diet. Nature is content with a little; but where sobriety wanteth, nothing is enough. The body must have sufficient lest it faint in necessary duties; but beware of gluttony and drunkenness. Christ saith, "Take heed, overload not your hearts with these burdens of excess." "Be not drunken with wine." These lessons are fit for England, where ancient sobriety hath given place to superfluity, where many such men are as fare daintily day by day. God grant their end be not like his, who riotously wasting here the creatures of God, wanted afterwards a drop of water when he would gladly have had it [*Sandys*].

Ver. 8—10. When we bear in mind that in spite of the help given them from this country one fourth part of the people of Ireland died in one year (1847) through the failure of a single article of food, we may have some idea of the distress of successive years. Not all the vast wealth of England would restore the withered joy that would result from the failure of the harvest and the destruction of herbs for a single year. The blight of a fly might consume cereal crops and prove more terrible than destructive war.

Ver. 13, 14. *Ministers.* A country parson fighting against the devil in his parish has nobler ideas than Alexander had [*Adam*]. Example works more than precept; for words without practice are but counsels without effect. But when we do as we say, we illustrate and confirm the rule which we prescribe. "Men believe more by the eyes than by the ears," says Seneca.

Ver. 15. *Judgment* will assign to every one a place according to character; ranks will be adjusted and precedency set right; virtue will be rewarded and vice punished. Thoughts of this day should restrain from vice and urge to virtue, preserve human society and defend religion, vindicate the character of God, and justify his providence to men.

Ver. 16—18. Nature presents two aspects towards us. If we sin and op-

pose her, she is stern, implacable, and destructive, charged with storms and thunder, famine and pestilence; if we yield and obey, we secure her blessings, co-operate with her laws, and command her forces. Love and serve God, and nature shall be at peace with thee.

Ver. 19, 20. Animal sensibility forms a perpetual appeal to human sensibility, and is an important means of its improvement. The progressiveness of creation is made subservient to the moral education and advancement of the human race. A single alteration throws the whole into disorder. What a picture, then, for man to be ungrateful, insensible, and rebellious in the sufferings of nature for his conduct!

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter still urges repentance, directs for a meeting of the people, and assures that God will have compassion. **1. Blow**] Priests must sound an alarm, as if foreign invasion nigh. **2. Darkness**] Four terms used to indicate the intense calamity (Ex. x. 22; Is. viii. 22). Swarms of locusts literally obscure the sun. **People**] numerous and most formidable. **Like**] Expressive of extraordinary judgments (cf. 2 Kings xviii. 5; xxiii. 5). **3. Fire**] They consume. **Eden**] Fruitfulness. **Nothing**] No herb, plant, nor tree, **shall escape.** "The word used elsewhere of *persons* who escape, suggests that we should not linger by the type of locusts only, but think of enemies more terrible, who destroy not harvests only, but men, bodies and souls." **4. Appearance**] like horses prepared for battle (Job xxxix. 20; Rev. ix. 7); swiftness and sound like chariots on rough mountain-tops. **6. Pained**] with terror. "More terrible than the locusts," says an Arab proverb. **Blackness**] from anxiety and fear (Lam. iv. 8). *Heb.* flames (Is. xiii. 8), to glow with heat: some to lose colour, to grow pale (Jer. xxx. 6). **7—9**] depict their military order and discipline; it is vain to resist (Ex. x. 6). A picture perfectly true to nature, says Jerome and others. **10.**] Heaven and earth feel their presence like a tempest-cloud of Divine wrath, covering all in darkness (Matt. xxiv. 29). **11.**] "*Lord* of the locusts," say Mohammedans, commands and makes the meanest the instruments of vengeance (Rev. xviii. 8). **12. Therefore**] repent with **heart** undivided, and with **fasting**, for heinous sins demand extraordinary penitence. **Mourning**] Lit. beating on the breast, like the publican (Lu. xviii. 13; xxiii. 48). **13. Not garments**] as customary in great sorrow (Gen. xxxvii. 29; Job i. 20). External repentance will avail nothing (Ps. li. 19; Ezek. xxxvi. 26). **14. Knoweth**] if the least **chance**, secure it. God may restore blessings sufficient to maintain his worship and supply our wants (Jon. iii. 9). **15. Blow**] Convene the people. **16, 17.**] No age and condition exempted, for all deserve punishment; the joy of the bride and bridegroom even must give place to penitential mourning. **17.**] The priests must take their position, and pray to God on behalf of his covenant people. **18. Then**] No longer threatenings, but promises. **Jealous**] of dishonour to them, love and pity for their welfare. **19, 20.**] Renewed fertility and removal of the cause of desolation; answer to prayer and bestowment of **great things** (Ps. cxxvi. 2, 3); expressive of a universal truth. **21. Fear not**] as in ch. i., on account of judgments, but rejoice in the destruction of the hosts. **22.**] Verdant pastures and trees laden with fruit shall be given. Beasts of the field shall no longer want. **23. Rain**] The **former moderately**, lit. according to right, i.e. in due measure, not in extremes to injure (Deut. xi. 14; Prov. xvi. 15). **The rain**] Generically, showers. **The latter rain**] to mature the crops; rain in season, rain in opposition to drought, and rain a type of all blessings. **24—27.**] Effects of the rain—abundance of all kinds of food; reparation of damage by locusts; redemption of Israel from the heathen; vindication of God and gratitude for his grace. **28—32. Afterward**] These outward things are only a type of spiritual gifts, a prospect of richer blessings; and a grander dispensation is held out, a dispensation remarkable for the Holy Spirit, as its sign and substance. This gift shall be **poured out** in copious and refreshing showers **upon all flesh**, Jew and Gentile (Acts x. 44; xi. 17), upon **servants** and **handmaids**, the most degraded and despised (Acts ii. 18). As the result, sons and daughters shall prophesy; dreams to the old and visions to the young; all shall know Divine things clearly. **30, 31.**] These manifestations, full of joy to believers, will be menacing to unbelievers. This day of the Lord will be attended by convulsions on earth, prognostications in heaven; to God's children, to all who call upon him, it will be a day of redemption; but these will be a **remnant** only. Seek to belong to it (**Acts ii. 40**).

HOMILETICS.

THE ALARM IN ZION.—*Verse* 1.

In the dreadful calamities described what must be done? Jehovah shows that the danger can only be averted by repentance, humiliation, and reformation of conduct. In this verse the prophet interprets present chastisements, and lays a foundation for intimations which follow. Alarm must be given, the people roused, and called to solemn assembly.

I. The place of alarm. "In Zion." Zion was once the seat of Divine government and consecrated by God's presence. The Church of Christ is now the holy mount, the city of the living God, and the school of instruction to the universe. It is the spiritual palace of the Great King, who rules his people by his Spirit, and governs the world by his providence. Here he displays tokens of love and judgment. Great everywhere, his judgments are specially great here. It is a solemn thing when judgment begins in the house of God. But he will not permit sin in his own residence. The Church must be conspicuous in its elevation, adorned with holiness, and loyal in obedience. "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of God from Jerusalem." **II. The means of the alarm.** In times of old it was the duty of the priests to warn the people and blow the trumpet (Num. x. 8). Ministers now must sound the alarm and declare the wrath of God against the unrighteousness of men. The watchmen of Zion must be awake, sound and "take the alarm they give." They must be "sons of thunder." They must not hesitate nor seek to hide the truth. The blast must wax louder and louder to startle thoughtless men. Ministers must never grow cold, careless of their own, and pitiless of the danger of others. When Perkins of Cambridge uttered the word *damned*, a solemn awe struck his hearers and the echo of it lasted many days. Whitfield brought tears in the eyes of old people, when he cried in the spirit of his Master, "O Glasgow, Glasgow!" "Blow the trumpet, and warn the people; then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning, if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head." **III. The reasons for alarm.** "For the day of the Lord cometh." 1. *The danger is near.* "The day cometh." Many ridicule and call earnest men enthusiasts. Others cry, "Be calm, there is no need for that ado;" but the prophet of God sees the danger and urges swift escape. The day "is nigh at hand," and not afar off; seen in present judgments and will come in sudden terror. Men are warned now of judgment to come and of enemies gathering together for fearful destruction. "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord; the mighty man shall cry there bitterly." 2. *The people are careless.* "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble." Though danger is nigh yet men neglect or despise it. They should *tremble*, start up from apathy and sullen indifference, and haste to the refuge. How stupid for persons in face of impending ruin to sit in ease! They provide in summer for winter, in youth and health for age and sickness, but strive not to escape spiritual death. They seek to ward off temporal evils, but eternal destruction is not foreseen and prepared for. Few hear the distant thunder which betokens the coming storm. In their fancied security they laugh at those who prepare for the evil day, laugh on the brink of that day which, unless sovereign grace intervene, will make them wise too late. "Lord, when thy hand is lifted up they will not see, but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them."

THE DARK DAY.—*Verses* 2, 11.

With four terms the day of Jehovah is described as a day of judgment. "A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness." Darkness

fell upon Egypt (Ex. x. 22), and enveloped Sinai at the giving of the law (Deut. iv. 11). This typical of the mysteries of God and the miseries of men.

I. The profound mystery of the day. As clouds of locusts darken the sky, so obscurity hangs over all Divine proceedings. We know that all calamities are judgments of some sort; that we are tried and judged now, "already made manifest to God," and that a day is nigh when all must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. But when and how the day will come no man knoweth. God veils his purpose and splendour. "Clouds and darkness are round about him." Wisdom prepares for events, folly rushes on and falls into the confusion. Walk by faith, do present duty, and cease to speculate. "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." **II. The great misery of the day.** As clouds indicate obscurity, so darkness denotes misery. The darkness of the locusts would be unparalleled. "There hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it." Present punishments are only the beginning, the foretastes of eternal. If justice and judgment distress men now, what will they be at the day of final accounts? The destruction of the temple, and the rejection of the Jews, signal visitations upon churches and nations, are faint symbols of the terror of that day. "That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness." **III. The overwhelming destruction of the day.** So great and terrible is the day, that the words are wrung from the prophet, "Who can abide it?" The displays of power will be omnipotent. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" It consumes like a fire and none escape or resist it. God has not diminished in majesty and might. As he discomfited Egyptians, so will he overcome his enemies at last. "He ruleth by his power for ever." "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?" There is only one way of escape. Repent and believe in Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.

Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through Christ I am,
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

THE ARMY OF THE LORD.—*Verses* 4—11.

The locusts are led by Jehovah, under his command, and sent to execute his will. "Lord of the Locusts" is one of the names of God in Mohammedan writings.

I. Numerous and strong. "A great people and strong" (ver. 2). "What more countless or mightier than the locusts?" asks Jerome. Each small and contemptible in itself, is made powerful by the strength of God. All agencies, human and Divine, are pliable to his hand, when he wants instruments of displeasure. **II. Courageous and swift.** "As the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run." Their heads are exceedingly like that of a horse. In flying they make a noise like rushing wind, and loud "as dashing waters," says a traveller. Like war-chariots rattling on rough mountain-tops, they speed to do their work. "The shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle" (Rev. ix. 7). "And the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots, of many horses running to battle" (ver. 9). **III. Universal and ill-omened.** As "a morning spread upon the mountains," like dawn ushering in a day of darkness and gloom. Or with yellow lustre on their wings, produced by the rays of the sun, they sweep down the mountains and announce the advent of terrible calamity. Travellers have noticed this feature. "The day before the arrival of the locusts," says one, "we could infer that they were coming, from a *yellow reflection in the sky*, proceeding from their yellow wings. As soon as this light appeared no one had the slightest

doubt that an enormous swarm of locusts was approaching." **IV. Orderly and well-equipped.** "Neither shall one thrust another." All keep their rank, march in ease and battle-array. "They charge like heroes," mount the walls and assail fortified cities with dauntless might. Like David's army, "they know how to keep rank," and diverge not to the left or right. They close up as comrades fall, and keep unbroken in military array (ver. 7, 8). Having surmounted the walls, they storm and sack, "and rush through the city" in fearful speed. "The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands." **V. Terrible and destructive.** 1. *The land is desolated.* Like a devouring fire, they consume every green thing on the earth. "Yea, and nothing shall escape them." "Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned; for they laid the pleasant land desolate." 2. *The inhabitants are alarmed.* They inspire terror, as universal and abject as that caused by an invading army. "Before their face the people shall be much pained, all faces shall gather blackness." In the agony of despair Eastern nations wait their approach to-day. "They shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames." 3. *Portentous signs in heaven and earth appear.* "The earth shall quake and the heavens shall tremble" (ver. 10). Take this in connection with the next, and we see the terrible day, the dissolution of the social fabric, symbolized by signs. Sun and moon grow dark and stars withdraw their light, because Jehovah comes to judge (Is. xiii. 13; Jer. x. 10; Nah. i. 5, 6). Nature is clothed in mourning, the universe trembles from predictions of judgment to come. Three sentences give the reason, for God does this—(*a*) Because his army "is very great." (*b*) Because this powerful army "executeth his word." (*c*) Because the day of judgment is so great and terrible that no one can stand before the wrath of the Judge.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 7. They are on God's message and they linger not, but rejoice to *run their course* (Ps. xix. 6). Men can mount a wall few at a time, the locusts scale much more steadily, more compactly, more determinately and irresistibly. The picture unites the countless multitude, condensed march, and entire security of the locusts with the might of warriors [*Pusey*].

On his ways. So each Divine judgment is directed, not by chance; adapted and weighed by infinite skill; and reaches in time and method just that person for whom it is intended. Nothing is lost, nothing escapes.

The judgments of God. I. The *nature* of the judgments. A day of darkness and gloom, none like them before or since. Most awful and extraordinary. II. The *executors* of the judgments. Not lions and beasts of savage name, but small and insignificant creatures, united, ranked, and commanded by the Divine leader; swift, furious, and irresistible in attack. III. The *effects* of the judgments. The execution most terrible—1. *In the country.* The garden of Eden was turned into a desolate wilderness. In front and rear the army was like a devouring fire. No green thing escaped. 2. *In the city.* They climbed the wall, and, as a thief, entered the windows and ransacked the place. No fortifications nor force can resist the commissions of God (Jer. ix. 21). If the weakest creatures cannot be turned aside, and the smallest judgments cannot be resisted, what of the greatest? what of the last of all?

They shall not break their ranks. Ver. 7. Unity is strength. The weakest efforts and agencies combined are powerful for good or evil. Rank and order are necessary to accomplish any victory. Confusion and disorder weaken; but when each goes on his way, patiently and perseveringly does his duty, success will be gained. Small armies, well disciplined and marshalled for battle, have vanquished and scattered hosts of disorderly foes.

> The least confusion but in one, not all
> That system only, but the whole must fall.

Learn—1. The resources of God to punish are abundant. 2. The power of God to punish is—(*a*) omnipotent, and (*b*) irresistible. 3. The times of God to punish are ominous.

Ver. 11. *The camp of God.* 1. *Birds and beasts of prey.* The meanest and mightiest creature. The lion in the forest and the moth in the sun. 2. *The elements of nature.* Winds and tempests, thunder and lightning, obey his will. Sun, moon, and stars cease to shine, and darkness covers the earth. 3. *The hosts of heaven.* Angels, armed with vengeance, destroy the first-born of Egypt and the army of Sennacherib The resources of the universe are under his command to bless or to destroy.

> What is creation less
> Than a capacious reservoir of means,
> Formed for his use, and ready at his will?

HOMILETICS.

Space for Personal Repentance.—*Verses* 12—14.

The design of chastisement is not destruction, but salvation. Mercy rejoiceth against judgment. The attainment of salvation is only by repentance and return to God. Hence the prophet in God's name urges personal and national amendment. Personal repentance is described in these words.

I. Its nature. "Turn ye even to me." 1. *It is return to God.* Return quite up to God, not half-way (Hos. xiv. 2). Half conversion, and half amendment will not avail. The whole distance must be overcome and God must be gained. Many are near to Christ, but not in him. All are alienated from God; and true reformation is not forsaking one habit to form another; changing one church or creed for another; but turning round in thought and feeling and coming to God. 2. *It is a sincere return.* It is real, not affected. "With all your heart." The mind and affections have been stolen from God, now all are centred upon him. Outward expressions are worthless, mere trappings of sorrow. "Rend your heart and not your garments." Partial feeling and feigned sorrow God will not accept. He requires truth in the inward parts. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." 3. *It is a sorrowful return.* "With fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning." There may not always be striking outward signs. But deep sorrow and contrition of spirit are accompanied with humiliation, self-denial, and prayer. The penitent weeps, mourns, and strikes his breast like the publican. Signs of grief often stir up the heart to more grief, and indicate to others the sincerity of conversion. Penitence must not be slight and superficial, but deep and real. "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." **II. Its motive.** "For he is gracious and merciful," &c. Hope of acceptance is held out. This hope is grounded on the gracious character of God, revealed on Sinai (Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7), and reproduced here to encourage repentance. 1. *God is gracious and merciful.* Though mercy has been despised and grace abused, he delights not in the death of sinners, but wishes all to turn and live. If he were not merciful we could not hope for pardon; and if he were only merciful and not gracious we could not expect to receive anything from him. 2. *God is slow to anger and of great kindness.* He can be angry and deal out punishment, but he pauses, lingers long, and gives opportunity to escape. His kindness is beyond human pity. He is longsuffering under the greatest provocations (Ps. ciii. 15). 3. *God repents of the evil.* If *he* repents of the punishments inflicted, will *they* not be accepted when they repent and return? Evils are against his will, his strange work, therefore on the first tokens of sorrow he will take them away. "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto them that call upon thee." 4. *God is a covenant God.* "Turn unto the Lord your God." They had turned away from God, but they were still his people. He is interested in their welfare, and unchangeable in his love and purpose. God must be approached as a covenant God. His Divine nature and mercy, his cove-

nant relations and promises, are all brought forth to urge men to return unto him. His goodness and mercy never fail. "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" **III. Its necessity.** "Therefore also now." *Now*, though it be late it is not too late. *Now*, though the day is near and locusts are at hand. "*Now* is the day of grace, the visitation from God." "Now or never." Sinners should not delay. Time is precious, opportunities may not be given again. Repentance is a spiritual, a personal, an immediate duty. "Now is the accepted time, to-day is the day of salvation." "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repentance." **IV. Its possibility.** "Who knoweth if he will return and repent," &c. Judgments may be taken away, the meat-offering restored, and a blessing left behind. Space is given men for repentance. We are not to be too confident lest we be careless. But there is no doubt in the prophet's mind. God will return. He never changes nor lies (1 Sam. xii. 22). His favour is not like the shifting clouds, nor the winter's sun casting occasional light, but withholding heat and joy. If we return to God he will return to us. "Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 12. Although all sorrow for sin hath not the same expression, nor the same degree of pungency and sensitive trouble, yet it is not a godly sorrow unless it really produces these effects, i. e. (1) that it makes us really to hate and (2) actually to decline sin; and (3) produces in us a fear of God's anger, a sense of the guilt of his displeasure; (4) and then such consequent trouble as can consist with such apprehension of the Divine displeasure [*Jeremy Taylor*].

Repentance is—1. A change of mind, a turning of the soul to God. 2. A real turning, not resting in shadows, not renting the mantle only, but the offering of the heart to God. 3. This is a personal duty. It cannot be done by representation or in the mass; but by each alone, the children alone, the parents alone, and the priests alone. 4. God will be satisfied with this, but with nothing less.

Ver. 13. God's character in its relation to our character and condition. Grace to the unworthy, mercy to the miserable, long-suffering to provocation, truth to the promise, and change towards the penitent. "Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion and gracious, long-suffering and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Ps. lxxxvi. 15).

Ver. 14. Prospects opened up by repentance. 1. Remission of temporal calamities. 2. Restoration of fruit and subsistence. 3. Spiritual blessings left behind dreadful curses. The storm will pass away and the sun will shine again; flowers and fruit shall come, birds shall sing, and joy and peace crown the land. "Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him."

HOMILETICS.

A Call to Public Repentance.—*Verses* 15—17.

Once more a day must be set apart for public fasting and humiliation. Personal repentance when genuine will lead to public confession. A sense of sin in the hearts of individuals will produce fruit and find expression in the actions of the community. Hence all the nation are summoned to solemn assembly. "Blow the trumpet in Zion."

I. **Great national danger urged them to public assemb y.** The nation is endangered by sin, sorrow has fallen upon all ranks, and sympathy unites them into

one. Assemblies are called for scientific and political purposes; but no assembly so solemn as that called by natural calamity. Affliction cements the hearts and binds the hopes of nations. It is in vain to sound an alarm for war, to blow the trumpet and muster our armies, without the favour of God. The most effectual call is that of a Church or a nation to repentance. The most powerful defence is universal penitence and prayer to God. By this alone can we overcome our enemies and avert the judgment of God. "Let tyrants fear," cried Queen Elizabeth when threatened with the Spanish invasion; "I put my trust in God, and in the loyal hearts and good will of my subjects" "For the Lord is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king." II. None of the nation were exempt from th call to public assembly. "Gather the people." 1. *The aged must assemble.* "Assemble the elders." Men of understanding and ripe in years must be active and eminent examples in times of fasting and humiliation. Wisdom and experience belong to them, advice and help are expected from them. 2. *Children must not be exempt.* "Gather the children and those that suck the breasts." The youngest and most helpless were involved in parental danger, and must touch parental hearts. The sight would be very affecting, and if God spared Nineveh for the sake of the children, he might spare Israel. The prayers of the aged and the cries of the young may not avail with men, but they are power with God. "All Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives and their children" (2 Chr. xx. 13). 3. *The newly married must obey the call.* "Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber and the bride out of her closet." Marriage joy must give place to national fasts, and feasting must be turned into mourning. There is a time for all things, and private interests must give place to public duties. The raptures of love must be forgotten in the guilt of the nation. It is mockery to spend time in making merry which ought to be consecrated to God in sorrow. All unfit for battle and all exempt from war (Deut. xxiv. 5); all classes of the community, the aged and the young, the mirthful and the mournful, the priests and the people, were required to attend. "In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth" (Is. xxii. 12). III. National confession was the object of public assembly. It was not an assembly for social entertainment and mirth. Not mere attendance and cessation from toil were required. It was "a solemn assembly," a meeting for deep humiliation before God. 1. *Confession was made through their public representatives.* The priests, "the ministers of the Lord" in dignity and office, must set the example, lead the assembly in weeping and prayer. In front of the Holy Place, in which Jehovah was enshrined, they must bend and plead for the people. Ministers should ever be intercessors for the nation, feel the condition of men, and urge them by precept and example to devote themselves to God. 2. *Confession was made on national grounds.* Prayer is based on grounds which should never be forgotten by God's people in like circumstances. It is a special liturgy for the solemn occasion. And God who reads the heart in the words will surely hear the words which he himself breathes in the heart. Mercy is the common cry. Punishment is deserved, but all were earnest in praying for deliverance from famine and reproach. "Spare thy people, O Lord." (1) *God's covenant relation is pleaded.* Spare us, not because we weep and fast, not because we deserve mercy, but because we are thine heritage, though unworthy of the name. Thou hast chosen us for thyself, remember and keep thy word with us and our fathers. The covenant of God is not to be renounced and forgotten by the penitent, but pleaded to secure a perpetual interest in God. (2) *God's honour among the heathen is concerned.* "Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?" If God does not fulfil his word and protect us, if we are utterly ruined by judgments, and insulted by idolaters, the enemies would rejoice and blasphemously inquire what God could do for his people? The penitent is humbled for his own sin; but when God is reproached, and his love called in question because he appears

severe, this is an addition to his sorrow, a sword in his bones (Ps. xlii. 10). He therefore pleads that God would defend his own glory, and not permit men to be confirmed in their error and folly (Ezek. xx. 5; xxxvi. 21, 23). "Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? Let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed" (Ps. lxxix. 10).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 15. *Sanctify a fast.* Care should be taken both by ministers and people in their stations, that every duty be not profanely gone about, nor external performances rested in; but that it may be done in a spiritual and sanctified manner, that there should be due preparation for it, and that the congregation come purified (as the word signifieth), according to the law, and fast in a sanctified manner [*Hutcheson*].

Ver. 16. *Gather the people.* 1. In times of calamity fasting may be appropriate. 2. In times of national calamity the nation, all the people, should join. 3. Men of superior rank should use their influence and stimulate others to attend God's house and regard God's word. By penitence and prayer an entire community may be saved from distress.

Gather the children. Anniversary Sermon. I. Many *gatherings* for children. Exeter Hall meetings; the Great Exhibition; children in Peel Park; Manchester; annual sermons and festivities. II. Many *purposes* for which children are gathered. 1. School education. 2. Social enjoyment. 3. Christian worship. 4. Solemn fasting and humiliation, in the text. III. Many *advantages* result from gatherings of children. 1. It is the fulfilment of Scripture. 2. Necessary for children themselves. 3. Beneficial in many ways to parents.

Ver. 17. *Weeping priests and guilty people.* The sins of the people and the sufferings consequent upon them should weigh upon the hearts of ministers. If God frowns upon a people, if error and evils abound in a community, are not the shepherds to blame? Of all members of a stricken Church, ministers have the greatest cause to mourn.

Reproach of Israel. 1. Departure from God. 2. Exposure to Divine judgment. 3. Enslaved by the heathen. Christians should maintain their credit and character, and especially deprecate reproach cast on the character and conduct of God.

Where is their God?—1. The spirit of the question. A question often put—1. In ignorance. 2. In atheism. 3. In ridicule. Carnal men ignorant of the character of God, the mysteries of his providence, and regardless of his people. II. The substance of the question. 1. This question reflects upon God. God's presence, God's providence, and God's word. 2. This question reflects upon God's people. They are considered worthless, forsaken, and despised. It is the most bitter of all taunts.

Spare thy people. I. The prayer. *Spare*, deliver from trouble, pardon sin and help in future. II. The plea. 1 *Thy people*, words of interest, submission and affection. 2. Thy people *in danger*, "that the heathen should not rule over them." God alone has the sole right to the homage and service of his people. We may always plead the interest which God takes in our spiritual welfare, as the reason for averting judgments from the Church and the nation which our sins have merited.

HOMILETICS.

RESTORATION OF LOST BLESSINGS.—*Verses* 18—20.

These verses form a transition from one part of the prophecy to the other When God's people returned to him in penitence, "*then*" he would be jealous for that land in which the temple stood, and for that people whom he still loved. He would hear their prayer, remove the curse, and restore the blessings, material and spiritual.

There is no contingency, no uncertainty in the promises. The predictions are absolute, the condition of repentance on which they rest being complied with. Israel was thus encouraged by Divine, not human, security for the fulfilment of God's word. Chastisement leads to repentance, and restoration of lost blessings the result.

I. **This restoration depends upon the sincere repentance of men.** "*Then* will the Lord be jealous." God's promises indicate conditions, and are adapted to certain states of mind. 1. *Blessings are restored through penitence.* They pre-suppose repentance, the efforts and the faithfulness of men. The removal of judgments and restoration of blessings were the result of the penitence and return of Israel. God waits to be gracious, and when sinners humble themselves and seek Divine favours they will be given. "For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left." 2. *Blessings are restored in prayer.* "The Lord will answer and say." Infidels object to prayer for daily food and propitious weather. Why should we pray for rain or sunshine, say they, when both depend upon laws of meteorology? The laws of nature are not incapable of modification. Every time we throw a stone or build a house, when we graft a tree, or restore a limb, laws are suspended and varied. If we can direct the hidden forces of creation, and make them subservient to useful purposes, shall the God of nature be powerless! But prayer itself is one of the most natural and prevalent laws of nature. We have proof in Scripture and in our own experience that in the history of men and the events of providence God has changed his proceedings in answer to fervent prayer. "The earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and they shall hear Jezreel." II. **Restoration springs from Divine pity to men.** The Lord will display his love, "and pity his people." Before, God was set upon their destruction. He was at the head of a great army, giving the word and combining the strength of the enemy. Now he is full of tender compassion, which resents injury done to them as if done to himself. God spares a people whom he may justly destroy. Humble penitents are permitted and encouraged to plead an interest in him. Natural affection prompts parents to help their children in distress; so God gives his people room in his pity, and blessings in their trouble. Compassionate kindness to the suffering is a dictate of humanity and one of the first principles of religion (Jas. i. 27; Matt. ix. 13). "To him that is afflicted, pity should be showed" (Job vi. 14). That pity which we should display towards our neighbour God will show to us. He is ready to turn away his anger and have mercy on us. "Ye have seen that the Lord is very pitiful."

> He hath a tear for pity, and a hand
> Open as day for melting charity.

III. **Restoration is in rich variety.** Calamities were not simply removed, but abundance of temporal and spiritual favours were bestowed. 1. *Material blessings were restored.* "I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith." The material condition of a nation and the outward prosperity of a people depend upon God. He can send famine, pestilence, and war. He alone can take them away. All human efforts are perfectly impotent without Divine co-operation. The husbandman may plough and sow, but God "causes the sun to rise and set." Parliament may legislate and the nation employ its resources, but God alone can remove oppression and restore fertility in the land. It is good for a people to hearken to God in distress, to recognize their dependence upon him in the seasons and operations of nature, and call upon him as the Giver of every good and perfect gift. "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me! He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat; and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee." 2. *National reproach was removed.* "I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen." Reproach is a sad thing for the people of God.

But in due time he will take away all visible signs of judgment. His people shall not suffer in reputation and on account of apparent unfaithfulness to them. They shall be free from insult and tyranny, and shall enjoy the credit and comforts of their religion. The best of men may have the bitterest foes, and be subject to the most cruel taunts. But the brutality of the enemy will move the pity of God. He will not long endure to see his children ill-entreated. His love will rouse his anger, and then it will be worse for the scorner and reviler. 3. *The mighty enemy was destroyed.* "I will remove far off from you the northern army." Whether "the Northerner" (Heb.) means the pest of locusts or the Assyrian army, God promises deliverance from them. As locusts were driven with the wind, to perish in the Arabian Desert, in the Dead Sea, and in the Mediterranean, to breed pestilence by the stench from their putrifying bodies, so the enemy shall be driven every way but the one from which he came. The destroyer shall do no further mischief. (*a*) *The destruction is entire.* They shall perish for lack of sustenance. Nothing shall remain but their ill savour. (*b*) *The destruction is deserved.* "Because he hath done great things," magnified himself against God. Pride and violence against God's people have ever been the features and forerunners of destruction. (*c*) *The destruction is fearful.* The countless hosts, full of life and activity, were scattered by the word of God on the waves of the sea, and thrown upon the shore a putrifying mass. Human malice and pride shall be destroyed. God takes away their breath and they become a carcase. Sennacherib's army in the evening inspired terror, "and before the morning he is not" (Is. xvii. 14). "And when they rose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses" (Is. xxxvii. 36).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

God's favours towards penitent sinners. 1. Zeal against them turned into pity for them. 2. Their prayers answered in abundant blessings. Material and spiritual good. 3. Their condition reversed. (*a*) Freedom for oppression. (*b*) Honour for reproach. (*c*) Feasting for fasting. (*d*) The removal of everything sad, and the bestowment of everything joyful.

The excellent condition of restored sinners 1. Enemies subdued. 2. Abundance enjoyed. 3. Blessings perpetuated.

Divine favours. 1. Their source—God's pity. 2. Their subjects—God's people. 3. Their result—"Ye shall be satisfied."

Ver. 19. *I will send you corn.* God averts the failure of crops and the scarcity of food. These evils neither come nor cease by accident. God gives us our daily bread. He opens his hand and we are satisfied with food [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

The Great Things of God.—*Verses* 21—27.

The locusts seemed to exult in the ruin they caused; but Jehovah doomed them to destruction, recovered the land from barrenness, and crowned it with beauty. The enemy had done great things against them; now God would do great things for them. No longer wasted fields and withered harvests. Joy is to succeed sorrow. The blessings are to be wide as the judgments, and man and beasts are to rejoice in the restoration of fruitful seasons and spiritual privileges.

I. **Great temporal blessings.** The seed shall be prosperous, and the vine give her fruit; the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens their dew again (Zech. viii. 12). 1. *Copious rain.* The plague of locusts and of drought had caused the land to mourn. "The garden of Eden" had become "a desolate wilderness." The only hope of recovery was in abundant and copious rain. Rain is promised by words multiplied in wonderful emphasis. First, showers in general, then in due

season, early and latter rain for autumn and spring. Rain in mercy and moderation. God sends or withholds the rain in sovereign wisdom. It comes not by chance, but Divine commission. It is given in due measure, and sent in special direction. "He causes it to rain upon one city, and not upon another." 2. *Fruitful seasons.* "The pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig-tree and the vine do yield their strength." Grass will spring, tender herbs bud, and fruit-trees yield their fruit. Living pastures shall satisfy groaning beasts, and universal fear shall give place to universal joy. God never left us without witness of his goodness and mercy, "in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." 3. *Replenished granaries.* "And the floors shall be full of wheat," &c. Barns shall no longer fall into decay, but wine, grain, and oil shall be given in abundance. Every trace of ruin shall disappear. "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." The devastation of former years shall be undone. Threefold blessings shall benefit the three departments of nature. The parched ground shall robe itself in living verdure, flowers adorn the field, and trees rustle with foliage. The herds of oxen and flocks of sheep shall no longer roam in agony and distress. Husbandmen, vine-dressers, and ministers of the altar must cease to weep, rejoice in God, and eat their bread in gratitude. "Your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time; and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely" (Lev. xxvi. 5). **II. Great spiritual blessings.** "And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel," &c. 1. *Restoration of national praise.* Through the sins of the people and the consequent judgments of God, sacrifices had ceased to be offered and joy had been cut off from the temple (ch. i. 16). The loss of religious privileges is a most grievous calamity. There is no place like the house of God to Christians. They prefer Jerusalem above their chief joy. Loss of bread is nothing to loss of the worship of God. It is a loss of social help and natural influence. Worship is man's greatest dignity and supreme good. When a nation gives praise to God they reap the highest enjoyments. "They shall praise the Lord that seek him; your heart shall live for ever." 2. *Manifestation of Divine presence.* "Ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel." Men do not always know, nations do not often recognize God. In prosperity and plenty they forget him. Harvests are expected as a matter of course. Human ingenuity and natural laws produce results. Creation is a mere machine without maker and controller. Thus the blessings of God are received in a forgetful, selfish spirit. But God interrupts the sequence of events, judgments are sent, to bring nations to regard Him. He withdraws his presence and permits plagues to bring them to repentance. "Are not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?" The heathen taunts, "Where is their God?" But God is sought in distress and found, and loving fellowship is restored. God is in the midst of the nation; she shall not be moved; "God shall help her, and that right early." 3. *Revival of national joy.* "Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God." Israel were not only to rejoice in God, but in God as the Lord their God. The world may be unable to rejoice, but God shall have their share of gladness. God promises and puts joy into their hearts; a joy greater than that created by corn and wine. Abundant crops and splendid seasons give uncertain gladness; but the manifestation of God's presence is a source of pure and permanent joy. "In thy presence is fulness of joy." Better empty barns than forsaken temples. Joy unspeakable and full of glory is the heritage and honour of that nation with whom God delights to dwell. "For, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy."

A Deity believed is joy begun;
A Deity adored is joy advanced;
A Deity beloved is joy matured;
Each branch of piety delight inspires.

4. *Deliverance from national shame.* "And my people shall never be ashamed." Pitied, delivered, and honoured, the people would be free from reproach. God's honour is linked with our honour, though we suffer reproach for a time; if we be ashamed of our sins against God, we shall never be ashamed to glory in him. He will never render his grace and purpose void. By the performance of his word and the destruction of his foe he will wipe away all dishonour. In Christ especially are these words realized. He suffers when we suffer, and relieves in poverty and tribulation. In him God returns to men, and turns again the captivity of Zion. Then we sing and cease to fear; we "obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 23. Rain a symbol of spiritual blessings. *I. Their source.* "He hath given you," "he will cause to come down." The laws of nature and heathen gods do not bestow rain. It comes from heaven (Acts xiv. 17; Is. lv. 10). *II. Their method of bestowment.* 1. In due season. The influence of the Spirit, like early rain in seed-time, waters instruction given, and like latter rain matures the soul in growth, and ripens it for heaven. 2. In rich abundance. Like copious showers, blessings shall descend and flow down to men. *III. Their blessed results.* 1. Barren land rejoices. Pastures revive and trees bring forth fruit. The little hills shout and sing for joy (Ps. lxv. 12, 13). Gospel blessings refresh thirsty souls and quicken desolate churches. 2. God's people are glad. "Be glad then, ye children of Zion." Joy springs from their hearts and harvests are reaped from their labours.

By heaven's influence, corn and plants do spring;
God's showers of grace do make his valleys sing.

Ver. 26. Spiritual feasting. 1. *The guests.* "Ye shall eat." God's people shall never want, though sometimes poor and persecuted. 2. *The provision.* Not mere temporal blessings (ver. 24); but joy in God's presence, all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. Plenty of it; not the least scarcity. 3. *The result.* (*a*) Satisfaction. "Be satisfied." Nothing but this will satisfy. "The meek shall eat and be satisfied" (Ps. xxii. 26). (*b*) Praise. "And praise the name of the Lord." Thanksgiving shall come after the fast. They shall never die of grief. Immortal joys shall be their portion. "Whosoever eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

I. The wondrous dealing of God. Israel in the wilderness and Israel delivered from the plague a type of God's dealings with us. He smites by wonders and he recovers by wonders. "God hath dealt wondrously with you." 1. *In the bounties of nature.* How wonderful to quicken the earth and send the beauties of spring, to give sunshine and shower, bread and sustenance, manna from heaven and waters from the rock. 2. *In the blessings of providence.* (*a*) Common mercies. Health and habitations. Thousands worse off than you. Many in poverty, prison, and disgrace. You have a goodly heritage among men. (*b*) Special mercies. Removal of family reproach and personal shame, deliverance from sickness and judgment. You are a wonder to many (Ps. lxxi. 7). 3. *In the gifts of grace.* (*a*) In the gift of Christ. Wondrous love, &c. (*b*) In the gift of the Holy Spirit to enlighten and teach. (*c*) In continued grace to renew and strengthen. "Thy love to me was wonderful." *II. The consequent gratitude of man.* "Praise the name of the Lord your God." 1. By acknowledging your obligations. "Your God." 2. By remembering his works. Israel forgat God even at the Red Sea, the most signal spot of their pilgrimage. "Talk ye of all his wondrous works." 3. By obeying his word. Show your gratitude in practical conduct. Let lips and life praise the Lord. "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

HOMILETICS.

The New Dispensation.—*Verses* 28—32.

By a natural transition the prophet rises from the temporal to the spiritual, from showers of rain to the outpouring of the Spirit. One blessing "*first*" (ver. 23), then "*afterward*" (ver. 28) a second and greater blessing. The words have special reference to the new dispensation, the dispensation of the Spirit. There are three distinct features connected together: the outpouring of the Spirit, the judgment upon the ungodly world, and the salvation of a faithful few.

I. The outpouring of the Spirit. "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." The outward blessings were typical of extraordinary spiritual blessings. Joel felt the need of spiritual influence, and believed that it would bring true enlightenment. We have not only a supernatural prediction, but a gleam of his own pure spiritual life. 1. *The extent of the communications.* "Upon all flesh." It was not to be confined within the narrow bounds of Judea, not limited to one, but extended to all races. It was to be given to the pious and to those deemed incapable of spiritual life. (1) *Without distinction of sex.* "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Not only parents, but children would receive this gift. Four sisters in one family were prophetesses (Acts xxi. 9). The young are capable of Divine teaching, and God has promised to continue his presence and propagate his word from one generation to another. "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children." (2) *Without distinction of age.* "Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." God adapts his grace to the condition of men. The inexperienced and the infirm; extremes in life may possess it. (3) *Without distinction of rank.* "And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids." This was something unexpected and had never been seen before. "*Even* the slaves," bondsmen and bondswomen, are to share in the gift. The lowest are exalted, and the gospel breaks the fetters of slavery. "Prophecy," said the Jews, "doth not reside except on the wise, and mighty, and rich;" but the poor have the gospel preached unto them. In Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one." 2. *The form of the communications.* "Shall prophesy, dream dreams, and see visions." These were the three modes by which God revealed his will to men in the O. T. days (Num. xii. 6). They are physical rather than spiritual; do not necessarily involve renovation of moral nature, but are made the symbols of fuller manifestation of miraculous gifts to some, and the outpouring of the Spirit to all. Yet taking into account the effects of this outpouring, we have reason to find a spiritual meaning. The Spirit would burst through every barrier and quicken the energies of life in all classes. Men would have the power to see and apply the truth of God to the facts of human life, past, present, and future. Spiritual light would not be confined to a select few. Dreams and visions should be given to others, and the mysteries of salvation be proclaimed to all nations. By these gifts the Church is founded, the ministry taught, and the Scriptures expounded in all ages. "Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream." **II. The dreadful judgment.** Judgment is connected with the outpouring of the Spirit. When God comes in the majesty of his power heaven and earth quakes. "Each revelation of God prepares the way for another," says an author, "until that last revelation of his love and of his wrath in the great day." "I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth." 1. In the *earth.* "Blood and fire, and pillars of smoke." Blood and fire were manifest in the plagues of Egypt, and smoke ascended like the smoke of a smelting-furnace in the descent of Jehovah on Sinai (Ex. xix. 18). Pillars of cloud roll up from burning towns in times of war (Is. ix. 17). 2. In the *heavens.* "The sun shall be turned into dark-

ness and the moon into blood." The darkening and extinction of the lights of heaven are often mentioned as harbingers of approaching judgment (Is. xiii. 10; Jer. iv. 23; Ezek. xxxii. 1—8; Matt. xxiv. 29). The language may be figurative to a certain extent; but strange phenomena in the physical creation have been observed to precede great catastrophes of the moral world. In the judgment on Jerusalem, *Josephus* tells of physical prodigies, massacres and conflagrations. *Humboldt* cites cases of remarkable obscuration of the sun, in very eventful years. But whether we understand the words naturally or symbolically, they teach that the judgment day does not come without warning. 1. *Foreseen by God's people.* These signs have no terror for them. They call upon God, and find in Him that refuge of which Mount Zion was only a type. 2. *Heeded by the penitent.* For among those who do not pray to God, some shall be called from their sins to find peace and security in him. "The remnant whom the Lord shall call." 3. *Neglected by the ungodly.* Understood and improved by right-minded persons; unheeded and often despised by enemies of God. Thus there is a gradual process of separation among men, a ripening for "the great and terrible day of the Lord." "Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke xxi. 36).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 29. *Pour out my Spirit.* Pour out like a rain-fall, or water-fall. The Spirit was not entirely wanting in the nation before this; but the prediction indicates—1. *A greater measure.* Not merely drop by drop, but pour out in greater abundance. 2. *A wider extent.* Not confined to members of the covenant nation, but upon "all flesh." This a great contrast to Gen. vi. 3. "This word 'flesh' (bâsâr), as contrasted with 'the spirit,' denotes human nature so sunk in bondage to its lower elements as to be incapable of spiritual life. But according to Joel, even this impenetrable 'flesh' is to be penetrated by the Divine Spirit; even the 'natural man' is to be transformed into 'a spiritual man;' even the incorrigible are to be recovered to obedience" [*Cox*].

In those days. This special truth connected with one special time, concerning which he knows little. The prophets sought diligently to know this time (1 Pet. i. 10). Apostles evidently studied the prophet Joel; but how reluctant was Peter to learn, and how astonished beyond degree that God would pour out his Spirit upon the Gentiles. "It needed," says one, "an express revelation and direct command before he could be persuaded that all flesh meant more than Jewish flesh. So often all our lives through, we have words in our mouths, and read and hear them, and yet their true, full meaning never strikes us. The truth is familiar to us, it is daily confessed and repeated by rote, but has never reached our hearts; then perhaps at length something wakens us up, and henceforward the truth is a living reality, influencing and moulding our lives" (ver. 30, 31). Physical phenomena serve — 1. To awaken men's minds from lethargy. They quicken attention and put them into attitudes of fear and expectation. Thus they urge repentance, and provide space for it to those who are induced to profit by them. 2. To prepare God's people for approaching trouble. They stimulate prayer, hope, and effort. In deliverance from Egypt (Deut. vi. 22); in the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. xxiv. 29); and before the final judgment, God displays signs and wonders to the joy of his people and the terror of his enemies.

Ver. 31. *The terrible day.* 1. Great in its *nature.* The last day. The end of time and the beginning of eternity. 2. Great in its *design.* To give to all their due. Great things will be done. Men judged, angels ranked, and all accounts settled. 3. Great in its *bearings.* *Great* to believers, *terrible* to unbelievers. Men separated and sent to their own place.

Call upon the name of the Lord. "Implies right *faith* to call upon him as he is; right *trust* in him, leaning upon him; right *devotion*, calling upon him as he has appointed; right *life*, ourselves who call upon him being, or becoming, by his grace what he wills" [*Pusey*].

Ver 28—31. The gospel dispensation is characterized — 1. By spirituality. 2. By liberty. 3. By power. 4. By expansiveness [*Pulpit Analyst*].

Shall be saved. 1. *The danger.* The word delivered means safety by *escape.* "Those who should be saved," i.e. those who were escaping from perils imminent and terrible (Acts ii. 47). The condition of the Church is often desperate; but that of the sinner is more desperate. 2. *The Saviour.* "The Lord." None other than Jesus. "For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv. 12; ii. 36). 3. *The encouragement.* (1) *Whosoever*, Jew or Gentile. "Thank God for that whosoever," said an aged person, "for it includes me." (2) *As the Lord hath said.* God has promised to save all that call upon him (Rom. x. 13). 4. *The result.* Those who are delivered are only a "*remnant*," a part of the whole. History and Scripture confirm these words. In the flood and destruction of the cities of the plain; in the entrance into Canaan and the return from captivity; in the first preaching of the gospel and the destruction of Jerusalem, a remnant only was saved. One is tempted to ask with the disciples, "Are there few to be saved?" but the answer is, *that* has nothing to do with you. "Strive ye."

The remnant saved. I. The blessing given. Salvation. Not merely promised, but actually given and cheerfully enjoyed, not in word, but in deed. Human beings redeemed and human nature renewed. *II. The source from whence it comes.* "In mount Zion and in Jerusalem," i. e. from God himself who dwelt and was worshipped in these places. The Church is the place of safety, and where God may be most easily found. *III. The method by which it is secured.* 1. *God calls men to him.* 2. *Men call upon God in prayer.* One description is a counterpart of the other; both go together, one is the human, and the other the Divine side of salvation. Deliverance depends not upon the worshippers alone, but upon God also. Those only are saved whom God calls to himself, and who call upon or choose him to be their God. It is all of grace. God must first call by his grace; then we obey his call, and call upon him; and he has said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me." God accounts our salvation his own glory. "The promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—3. *Alarm.* We might reasonably expect that the world would gather round the feet of the teacher. There is need for alarm, for men are indifferent. There is a way of escape, but men know or heed it not. Multitudes pass on and perish in the evil day. Noah regarded the signs of the times, and "moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house." "He that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise."

> Be wise to-day; 'tis madness to defer:
> Next day the fatal precedent will plead;
> Thus on, till wisdom is pushed out of life.
> [*Young.*]

Ver. 4—11. *Locusts.* The head is exceedingly like that of a horse [*Theodoret*]. Their noise is like the rushing of a wind [*Forbes*]. When they alight and feed, the plains are all covered. They make a murmuring noise as they eat, and they devour herbs, trees, and forage without restraint. "They overshadow the sun," says Pliny, "the nations looking up with anxiety, lest they should cover their lands." "The height of walls cannot hinder the charge of the mighty; they enter not by the gates, but over the walls. They fly, by the disposal of God ordaining, in such order, as to hold each his place, like the minute pieces of mosaic, fixed in the pavement by the artist's hands, so as not to incline to one another a hair's breadth"

[*Jerome*]. Nothing in their habits is more striking than the pertinacity with which they all pursue the same line of march, like a disciplined army [*Thompson*]. They teach us the necessity of unity, steadfastness, and order. Many prefer an individual course instead of going by bands. They belong to no cohort, and are under no discipline. The strength of the Church lies in united, concentrated action. Every soldier well-disciplined and in his ranks; every officer at his post, and ready for the contest; each under rule, helpful to each other and to the common cause.

Ver. 11. *Voice.* Lest God should be forgotten, he is represented as commanding a mighty army in the midst of judgments. Their presence indicates his presence and power. "The Lord of hosts mustereth the host of the battle" (Is. xiii. 4). He called the Medes and Persians to execute judgments upon Babylon. "He sent forth his armies and destroyed" Jerusalem, "and burnt up their city" (Matt. xxii. 7). Hence the threefold ground of terror. 1. His camp is very great. 2. He has strength to accomplish his purpose by the weakest instruments. 3. When this purpose is accomplished, it will be a terrible day to the enemies.

Ver. 12—14. *Fasting* and *penitence.* Men accused in times past were wont humbly to abase themselves before the judge, with long beards, uncombed hair, and black array, that they might secure his mercy. So when pestilence, famine, or war begin to rage, or any calamity hangs over us, it becomes us to present ourselves in piteous array, with fasting and prayer, before the Judge of all the earth, that his anger may be turned away from us [*Cawdray*]. But no amount of fasting will do without true penitence. Lifeless repentance is fruitless. No outward propriety and offerings will wash away the stain of sin. We must not only confess but forsake our sins and turn unto God. God will have mercy upon the penitent.

The fruitless showers of worldly woe
Fall dark to earth and never rise;
While tears that from repentance flow,
In bright exhalement reach the skies.

Ver. 15—17. In this assembly kings and priests lead the way; nobles and common people promptly join. The whole multitude bow like one man, and fall prostrate at the footstool of mercy. All acknowledge their guilt and are sensible of their danger. All repent and pray that God would spare his people. Though repentance is now put in the inward dispositions of the soul, yet on occasion of national humiliation, and peculiar religious solemnity, it may be suitable to testify by our deportment and dress, the seriousness and sadness of our minds. Splendour and gaiety of apparel, if *ever* becoming Christians, should be laid aside at such seasons. It is well when the government of a nation, in its spiritual and political authorities, takes the lead in the promotion of piety and regard to the doctrines and duties of religion. It is most touching and instructive to see all classes of the community lift up their hearts in prayer for mercy and deliverance.

Ver. 20. The south and east winds drive the clouds of locusts with violence into the Mediterranean, and drown them in such quantities that when their dead are cast on to the shore, they infect the air to a great distance [*Volney*]. Wonderful image of the instantaneousness, ease, completeness, of the destruction of God's enemies; a mass of active life exchanged, in a moment, into a mass of death [*Pusey*].

Ver. 22—25. It is too clear for either argument or illustration, that if you change the moral character of any country from ignorance to intelligence, from indolence to industry, from intemperance to self-discipline, from sensualness to spirituality, from enmity to love, that the whole material region in which they live may abound with plentifulness and beauty. Such a change throughout the whole human population to-day will give to all a new heaven and earth [*Dr Thomas*].

Ver. 26, 27. *In the midst.* It was to induce this devout and thankful recognition of the Divine presence that the judgment had been sent. Dulled by routine blinded by use and wont, the Jews had come to regard the succession

of the seasons and the bounty of the year in a hard mechanical way, as though Nature were a mere engine or machine. It was to convince them of his presence in Nature, to make them pure, strong, and happy, that God interrupted the usual sequence of events, first by disasters over which they had no control; by *plagues* (literally "blows"), which they understood as judgments; and then by acts of grace and good will, which they understood as signs of his returning favour. Terrified by disasters, and attracted by blessings which seemed to them answers to repentance and prayer, as they "ate and were satisfied," the people "*praised the name of Jehovah their God*," who had dealt wondrously with them; they felt, they acknowledged that he was "*in the midst of*" them, in their fields and in their vineyards as well as in the temple, and that Jehovah was their God and none else, since only he could send them rain and fruitful seasons, and fill their hearts with gladness [*Samuel Cox*].

Ver. 28—32. So large a promise naturally awakens inquiry. We ask, "When was it or will it be fulfilled?" Joel expected and saw a fulfilment of it in his day. The people saw God in the ordinances of the sanctuary, but not in the fields and laws of Nature. The beneficent order of Nature was interrupted. This was taken as a judgment, and led to repentance and recognition of God. Were not the same conditions repeated in St Peter's time with the like results? The Jews came up to the temple to worship, but failed to see "God manifest in the flesh." Judgment came upon them. They awoke to a consciousness of their sin, repented, and turned unto the Lord. The Spirit came down upon them, and this new accession of life was a judgment to the men of that generation, trying what manner of spirit they were of, revealing the evil spirit by which *they* were animated, who opposed themselves to the power and grace of God. None the less may we say, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel," in every new crisis of the religious life, in a man, in the race, or in the world. In all ages the same sequence recurs—sin, judgment, repentance, a new spirit, and in this new spirit a new test and criterion to which men are brought, and by which they are either approved or condemned [*Samuel Cox*].

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **For**] Explanatory of judgment predicted (ch. ii. 31). **Those days**] Viz. the outpouring of the Spirit, further described by the words "when I shall bring," &c., redemption from distress of every kind; including gathering together of the dispersed, elevation into new and greater glory, exceeding earlier political or spiritual condition. **2. Valley of Jehoshaphat**] where confederate foes were overthrown, say some (Ps. lxxxiii. 6—8; 2 Chron. xx. 22—26); others think it is near Jerusalem (cf. Zech. xiv. 4), and the term given to indicate the judgments of God upon the nations there. The ultimate events are still future, and fill up the space between the restoration of the Jews and the second advent of Christ. **Plead**] Not merely argue against enemies, but deal with them in judgments (Is. lxvi. 16; Ezek. xxxviii. 22). **3. Lots**] A common way of dividing captives (Nah. iii. 10). The harlot was not paid in money, but with a boy; and a girl was of so little value, that they sold her for a drink of wine. This depicts the ignominious treatment of Israel by the enemy. **4. With me**] i.e. my people, with whom God identifies himself. **Recompense**] "If ye injure me" (my people) "in revenge for fancied wrongs" (Ezek. xxv. 15—17), "I will requite you in your own coin swiftly and speedily." **5. Taken**] Not only plundered the temple and its treasury, but palaces and houses of rich, which always followed conquest of towns (1 Kings xiv. 26; 2 Kings xiv. 14). **Your temples**] Spoils of war were often hanged up in heathen temples. They spoiled Jehovah's temple and profaned their own. **6. Far**] Captive Jews cut off from all hope of return.

7, 8.] The nations repaid by the *lex talionis*. God's people would regain liberty, and sell their enemies as they had been sold by them. **9.**] A call to war (Ezek. xxxviii. 7). **Prepare**] Lit. sanctify, for heathen war began with religious ceremonies (Jer. vi. 4; 1 Sam. vii. 8, 9). **Wake up**] Arouse the heroes from sleep; forge tools of peaceful agriculture into weapons, and the weakest must be a hero. **11. Assemble**] Hasten, quickly as possible meet together. **12. Wakened**] Not now to war with God and his people, but to be judged (Is. ii. 4; Ps. cx. 6). **13.**] The judgment compared to a double figure. **14.**] A description of the streaming of nations into the valley of judgment. **Multitudes, multitudes**] Heb. immense multitudes; akin to our *hum*, noisy crowds (2 Kings iii. 16). **15—17.**] Dreadful commotions will happen before that day. Out of Zion Jehovah will destroy his enemies, protect his people, and purify his sanctuary. **18.**] After judgment upon all nations, the land of Jehovah shall overflow with Divine blessings; but the seat of the world will become barren waste. **Drop**] Poetic for great fertility, happy times and plenty. **Valley of Shittim**] Even the arid desert shall be fertilized with blessings from Jerusalem (Zech. xiv. 8; Rev. xxii. 2). **19. Egypt** and **Edom**] Both remarkable for enmity to Jews and emblems of enemies to God's people. They have been desolate for centuries (Is. xix. 1; Jer. xlix. 17; Obad. 10). **20. Dwell**] Abide; the true Church shall never be destroyed, but all false, persecuting people will be annihilated (Amos ix. 15). **21. Cleanse**] Wipe away blood-guiltiness, the climax of her sin, and for long not purged away, but visited with judgment. Amid extraordinary manifestations of wrath in the destruction of the wicked, Israel will be saved, and learn anew that Jehovah is their holy God and King.

HOMILETICS.

PUNISHMENT UPON THE PERSECUTORS OF GOD'S PEOPLE.—*Verses* 1—3.

The prophecy from ch. ii. 28 to the end of this book constitutes one whole, embracing the Messianic period, from the day of Pentecost to the final triumph and consummation of the kingdom. The events of the past are framed to describe the revelations of the future. In the second division (ch. iii. 1—21) we are introduced to events which issue in the restoration of Israel, which form the crisis of the destiny of the world, and which describe the final conflict of good and evil. Israel, viewed as the representative of God's kingdom, are persecuted by the Gentile nations who are enemies to God. But he will deliver them from oppression and destroy their persecutors.

I. The cruel treatment of God's people. God's people, consecrated to him by covenant, have ever been despised by the world. Ungodly men belong to a system entirely opposed to their spiritual interests, and established upon laws and institutions which resist the authority of God. The indignities done to Israel are specified in the text, and typical of many forms of persecution. 1. *They were robbed of their own land.* "And parted my land." All the earth is the Lord's, but he locates his people, and dwells with them in certain places. The land belonged to him as well as the people, and when they cannot defend it, he will assert his rights to it and regain it. The enemy acted on the ancient motto, "Conquer and divide." They parted the land and shared it amongst them. But those that enrich themselves by robbing God's people will be spoiled of their own treasures. Wealth and reputation taken from others will not fit well on ourselves.

> Who steals my purse, steals trash;
> But he that filches from me my good name,
> Robs me of that which not enriches him,
> And makes me poor indeed.—

2. *They were scattered in other lands.* "Whom they have scattered among the nations." God's people were driven by violence into heathen nations and enslaved. The disciples were persecuted and fled from city to city. The early Christians were banished to mines of other countries, and islands of the sea. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Christ had it, and his people cannot expect any better treatment. Scorn and ridicule, social calumny and religious degradation, cannot be avoided. ever excite the ill, and "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall

" 3. *They were indignantly treated.* "They have cast lots for *They despised them.* Treated them all alike, honourable and

dishonourable. They were all worthless, despised, and distributed by lot, a greater indignity than captivity and slavery. To trample on the weak and the fallen is most inhuman. "How unsuitable is it for us, who live only by kindness, to be unkind," says Edwards. "And they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains." (*b*) *They sold them as slaves.* They were disposed of to slave-dealers at most ridiculous prices. A *boy* was given instead of money for the hire of a harlot, and a *girl* was sold for a drink of wine in revelry. This was done by Assyrians, Chaldees, and Romans. Enmity to God and persecution of his people have often been connected with scenes of sensuality. But how barbarous for men to sport with their own species, and prefer a moment's gratification to the permanent interests of men. What inhumanity to subject young, innocent children to extreme hardship and anguish from such base motives! Let us thank God that the horrors of slavery are past, that we live in a land of personal liberty and religious laws. II. The punishment of their enemies. "I will gather all nations," &c. God may suffer enemies to prevail for a time, but the year of recompenses will come. God will avenge his own elect. 1. *The time is fixed.* "In those days and in that time." The day, the hour may be unknown to us; but they are fixed immutably in the purpose and providence of God. There is a year of the redeemed, an acceptable year for the opening of the prison to them that are bound, for the bringing again of the captivity of Zion (Jer. xxx. 3). 2. *The place is fixed.* The valley of Jehoshaphat may mean the valley in which God destroyed the numerous enemies of that prince (2 Chron. xx. 26—28); or, in allusion to the word (meaning "the Lord hath judged"), it may refer to any scene when God will deal out retribution and execute his enemies. In due time and in some great valley God will punish sinners and reckon with nations for their infamous conduct. God is gathering men now in mysterious ways, will soon plead with them, accuse and condemn them, and "there shall be tribulation, such as there had not been from the beginning of the world." 3. *The reason is assigned.* "For my people." God's people are precious in his sight, whatever be their treatment and outward condition in the world. (*a*) They are his *people.* They have given themselves to him, and belong entirely to him. Others refuse allegiance and forget God, "but the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." (*b*) They are his *heritage.* He chose Israel as his heritage and peculiar treasure, his portion and treasure above other people (Deut. xxxii. 9). When weak and desponding in trial he assured them of his love and defence. The most precious things in the universe are holy people. God claims them for his own, will never permit them to be lost, but will vindicate their cause and redeem them from death. "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of my eye." "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. *I. The sad condition.* "Captivity of Judah." The Church is often oppressed and persecuted by enemies, thrown into captivity by backslidings, and bound fast by things of time and sense. The sinner is under the bondage of sin, captivated by lust, and lashed by a guilty conscience. *II. The blessed change.* "Bring again the captivity." Sins are forgiven, and persecutors are overthrown. God's power redeemed Israel from literal, and God's grace delivers men from spiritual, slavery. *III. The time of the change.* "In those days and in that time." God has his own times of deliverance. His people should have patience and hope, for they shall not sorrow a day longer than he has purposed. Divine decrees have fixed the time for blessing the Church, and neither Rome nor infidels can hinder the work. "Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion; for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come" (Ps. cii. 13). *IV. The author of the change.* "*I* shall bring

again." It is God's work and not man's. He makes, keeps, and saves the Church. He purchased and will defend his people. He will in judgment and in grace destroy the wicked, and bless the righteous. "When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad."

Ver. 2. 1. The assembly. "All nations." 2. The place. "The valley of Jehoshaphat." 3. The purpose. I "will plead." 4. The reason. "For my people." "Here the fate of whole nations is obviously bound up with that of Israel, and is to depend on the relations they have sustained to the people of God" [*S. Cox*].

Valley. In the days of Joel *valleys* were the usual fields of "battle," mountainous and wooded country being unfavourable to the movements, tactics, and strategical combinations of ancient military art. Naturally, therefore, the Prophet would select some *valley* as the arena of the final conflict. But *this* conflict was also to be a judgment. Was it possible to select a valley whose very name should convey the idea of judgment and of Divine judgment? Yes; close outside the eastern wall of Jerusalem lay a valley, known as the "valley of Jehoshaphat." "Jehoshaphat means, Jehovah *judges*. Here ready to his hand were the very symbols the Prophet required. The scene of the final conflict and the final judgment would *be the valley in which Jehovah judgeth* and will judge [*S. Cox*].

HOMILETICS.

RIGHTEOUS RECOMPENSE.—*Verses* 4—8.

Before depicting final judgment upon hostile nations of the world, Joel glances at the enmity which the neighbouring peoples displayed towards Israel, and foretells a righteous retribution for sins they had committed against God's people.

I. **The sins of which they were guilty.** In their idolatries they grievously sinned; but their greatest offence was insult to God and his people. 1. *They sold the people as slaves in captivity.* They had scattered them among the nations, and forced them to seek for shelter where they could. (*a*) It was *cruel captivity.* They were dispersed and divided for fear of incorporation with the common inhabitants. (*b*) It was *hopeless captivity.* "Ye have sold them unto the Grecians that ye might remove them far from their border." By selling their fighting men they would weaken the Jews, and taking them afar would render more hopeless the return to the land they loved. They displayed great malice, were delighted with the distress of the persecuted, and sought to triumph over God himself. Traffic in the souls of men, slave-dealing and men-stealing, is the worst kind of traffic, branded with infamy, and will bring down the curse of Heaven. What has become of American slave-trade, "State rights," and secession? God has broken in pieces the oppressor; and well did Abraham Lincoln say: "This is a world of compensations, and he who would be no slave must consent to have no slave. Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and under a just God cannot long retain it." 2. *They plundered the temple and palaces of the land.* "Ye have taken my silver and my gold." The vessels of the temple and the treasures of the palace were carried away, and the land treated as conquered territory. The Prophet says *my gold.* All the wealth bestowed upon Israel and upon us, in the providence of God, belongs to him, and should be recognized as the gift of God (Hos. ii. 8). If we are his people, what we have we hold from him, and should devote to him. "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Hag. ii. 8). 3. *They profaned the sacred things of God.* "And have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things." They dedicated the spoils to their gods, hung up the vessels of the holy sanctuary on the walls of their temples, and attributed victory over God's people to the power of their idols. The ark was put in the temple of Dagon, the gold and silver adorned Belshazzar's

feast, but God maintained his honour, and defended his cause. Robbery itself is most unjust, but when the spoils are consecrated to idolatry, and given to support cruelty and false religion, this will prove most destructive to the worshipper. "He entangleth his soul in the snares of death who resumeth unto a profane use that which is once consecrated unto God," says Bishop Hall. "It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy." **II. Divine recompense upon these sins.** "Will ye render a recompense?" &c., indicate that they had no cause to retaliate upon God or his people; that if repayment is the question, God will very speedily settle that for them, and bring back their doings upon their own heads (Isa. v. 26). 1. *Retribution is declared.* The life as well as the death of his saints is precious in the sight of God. Those who injure them injure him. He will not suffer them to be insulted and enslaved. He will demand an account for them. Suffering and blood cry to Heaven for justice. Martyred saints and God's captives will not be forgotten. He will honour, spare, and avenge them. "When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble." 2. *Retribution in kind.* "And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the land," &c. As they had sold and scattered the Jews, so they would "be paid back in their own coin;" they in turn would be sold by the Jews. Here we have the true *lex talionis.* The rod which men make to smite others, shall smite themselves. "Curses are like young chickens, they always come home to roost." "As he loveth cursing, so let it come to him" (Ps. cix. 17). Dogs licked the blood of Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth. The evil deeds of persecutors will fall upon themselves in this world, or that which is to come. "His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing upon his own pate." 3. *Retribution with certainty.* "For the Lord hath spoken it." This was fulfilled in the time of Alexander the Great and his successors, when Jewish prisoners were set at liberty, and Phœnician territories were under Jewish sway. Sooner or later retribution will come, and there is no escape. No idols can deliver them. The inhabitants of Tyre chained their gods, that they might not forsake them when besieged by Alexander, but the word was spoken, and the city is no more. 4. *Retribution with speed.* "Swiftly and speedily will I return your recompense." God threatens these piratical slave-dealers with the vengeance of their captives, whom he redeems. When they pride themselves in triumph and forgetfulness, a sudden change shall come. With ease and speed God will send the punishment and "judge his people." God seems to delay, but at length unexpectedly does he surprise men. And when once he begins, he hastens on and makes short work in the execution of his judgments. "According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 4. *What have ye to do with me?* 1. The words *and also* show that there is something additional to the deeds of those spoken of before. Those instanced before were great oppressors, such as dispersed the former people of God, and *divided their land.* In addition to these, God condemns here another class, those who, without having power to destroy, harass and vex his heritage. 2. The words, *what are ye to me?* are like that other phrase (Jos. xxii. 24; Matt. viii. 29), *what is there to thee and me?* i.e. what have we in common? 3. These words, *what are ye to me?* also declare that those nations had no part in God. God accounts them aliens. *What are ye to me?* Nothing. 4. But the words convey, besides, that they would have to do with God for harassing his people without cause. They obtruded themselves, as it were, upon God and his judgments; they challenged God; they thrust themselves in, to their destruction, where they had no great temptation to meddle, nothing but inbred malice to impel them. They stand among the most inveterate and unpro

voked enemies of God and his people [*Pusey*].

Ver. 7. *I will raise. I. Deliverance of God's people.* Though carried far away and put under grievous bondage, God will gather them again. Neither former judgment nor present distress shall hinder. Though like men asleep, he will *raise* or *awake them*, as the word imports. Though their condition be hopeless as the dead, he can deliver them (Ezek. xxxvii. 11, 12). The might of the foe and the wonderfulness of the promise should not impede our faith. "*Behold*, I will raise." *II. Destruction of God's enemies.* "I will return your recompense." 1. The *agent.* God himself, not chance, nor mere change of circumstances. "*I* will sell." 2. The *instrument.* The Church, the people themselves who were persecuted. What wisdom, power, and providence! 3. The *measure.* God repaid in the same proportion which they gave to his people. The guilt of these nations was great, beyond ordinary persecution, hence the retribution severe, and in kind upon their own heads. History confirms the fact that men get back what they give to others, (*a*) in *quality*, good or bad; (*b*) in *quantity*, so much, whatever the measure may be. "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

Retributive judgment. *I. Often given by men.* In society men reap as they sow. Kindness begets love, and cruelty begets hatred. The suspicious are suspected, the dishonest robbed, and the tyrants in turn led into captivity. "There is an important element," says a writer, "of the judicial action of God in the retributive instincts of men. It is one of his ways of bringing the self-conceited and the censorious to his bar. He whose hand or tongue is against every man, need not wonder that Divine providence should so balance the scales of justice, that every man's hand or tongue will be ultimately against him. He reaps what he sows." *II. Always administered by God.* "The Lord hath spoken it." All retribution comes from him, given by men or laws of nature. In the present it is true—"With the merciful, thou wilt show thyself merciful; with an upright man, thou wilt show thyself upright; with the pure, thou wilt show thyself pure; with the froward, thou wilt show thyself froward." But the Bible predicts a retribution, most just, adequate, and terrible. The innocent will then be cleared, and the persecutor condemned.

Oh! blind to truth and God's whole scheme below,
Who fancy bliss to vice, to virtue woe.

HOMILETICS.

THE HOLY WAR.—*Verses* 9—12.

God is now about to execute the sentence, and all nations are summoned together. At God's command, yet of their own accord, they assemble in the valley of Jehoshaphat, to receive righteous retribution.

I. The solemn preparation. "Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles." The combatants are mighty, and the results will be decisive. Every preparation is needful for this moral warfare. 1. *This warfare is moral.* "Prepare, i. e. sanctify, war." It is a holy war, a crusade between good and evil. Not like those in which the pilgrims of Europe sought to rescue the holy sepulchre from the hands of infidel Turks. God's people and God's enemies are in battle-array. Moral powers and evil principles are engaged in mortal contest; the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light are striving for dominion. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." 2. *This warfare* "Let all the men of war draw near." The armies are not spectators, nor stand afar off, daring and defying one another, like Israel and the

Philistines did (1 Sam. xvii. 3), and the Turks and the Christians in the reign of Baldwin II., king of Jerusalem. They "*come up*" into close quarters, and fight for life. The enemy is bold, comes up into the very presence of God, and insults his people. We must not hesitate nor fear. "Into the ranks of the enemy," cried a general, on the field of battle. Stand still, and you are overcome; fight, and you conquer. "Quit yourselves like men, and fight." 3. *This warfare is urgent.* "Assemble yourselves and come." The nations must hasten and come speedily. All "round about" must gather themselves together, and draw closer and closer in the contest. Christian life is urgent and important. The gospel demands immediate and earnest decision for God. There must be no delay. Judgment delays not. "Now is the accepted time." 4. *This warfare demands sacrifice.* "Beat your ploughshares into swords," &c. The tools of peaceful agriculture must be forged into weapons of war, the reverse of the time when instruments of war will be turned into implements of agriculture (Isa. ii. 4; Mic. iv. 3). All was unsettled; the means of subsistence and the care of health were to give way to war. In spiritual warfare, ease and pleasure, sin and the world, must be given up. All must be equipped. The aim is not temporary; it requires a weapon and strength to use it. "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one." God has provided a complete armour in which he must fight, and by which alone he can triumph. The self-willed, who fight in their own way, and with their own weapons, will never conquer. "Put on, therefore, the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand." II. The mighty hosts. "Come, all ye heathen." "Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision." 1. *A universal gathering.* "All nations." Not simply all the heathens, but all nations of the world are concerned in this warfare, and will stand before the throne of God at last. All the generations of men, innumerable angels will appear before the Great Judge. Our Lord directs our attention to this very thought of Joel. "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels, with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations." 2. *An imposing gathering.* "Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near." Heroes, men of valour and experience, will be there, and, like Homer's gods, engaged in the conflict. The Great God who calls it, the solemn purpose for which it is called, and the method of dealing with it, will make that assembly most awful. The Judge will be clothed in majesty and terror. Angels and millions of the human race will stand before the great tribunal. The splendour of the great white throne will eclipse the sun.

> No sun had e'er dawned on
> So fearful a day,
> No trumpet had marshalled
> So dread an array.

3. *An enthusiastic gathering.* The whole nations are seized with warlike enthusiasm, and rise from slumber at the summons. Even "the weak" one must "say, I am strong." None, however apparently unfit, was to be spared, and none left behind. Inspired with ardour, and drawn by numbers, they gather "to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (Rev. xvi. 14; xx. 8). III. The great defeat. Ostensibly the nations assemble to destroy God's people, but are overcome themselves. God sits upon the throne to judge "the heathen round about." The conflict is instigated by the very parties whose doom is settled for ever. 1. *Their resistance was in vain.* Let the mighty men "wake up" to gather their resources and strengthen their ranks, all is futile. Men may resolve, and eagerly undertake opposition to God, but they will be disappointed. "The heathen rage," but their rage displays their folly. God is omnipotent, and can overcome the mightiest hero. "The people imagine a vain thing," for "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision." 2. *Their overthrow was great.* There was not mere failure but terrible disaster. God's mighty ones

came down, the powers of nature robed themselves in opposition, the sentence was passed, and execution followed. The purpose was defeated, and those who mustered for victory were overthrown with disgrace. Popery has hastened its downfall, by trying to break the power of Protestantism. The French were crushed in their efforts to destroy the political influence of Germany. Those who fight against God, despite imperial strength, will be broken in pieces. The ruin of sinners will be eternal if God shall smite them. "Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces." (Is. viii. 9.)

THE TERRIBLE OVERTHROW.—*Verses* 13—16.

The prophet earnestly besought God to call his "mighty ones" in the final scene. God responds, brings his messengers, and bids them put in the sickle, for all things, good and evil, are ready for judgment. Three things are to be noted in the description of this judgment.

I. **It is a moral result.** As ripe corn is ready for harvest, and full vats and winepresses for treading out, so men prepare for judgment. 1. *Sin ripens men for destruction.* It unfits the soul for the enjoyment of God, creates many horrors and foretastes of hell, and renders men ready for destruction. 2. *Holiness ripens men for glory.* It fits the soul for the society of the blessed, makes meet for the heavenly inheritance, and will be consummated in God's presence. Thus judgment is only a harvest for which men are ripening in the present life. The wicked are filling up the measure of their iniquity (Gen. xv. 16); the righteous are reserved for degrees of holiness which will perfect their character (Eph. iv. 7—13). Both will reap as they sow. "For whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." II. **It is universal.** The prophet seems amazed at the great throng assembling together. "Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision." It is one living, surging mass, an innumerable army, rushing blindly on to their own destruction. Or, to take the figure of the text, vast numbers are ripe for judgment. Angels and wicked spirits, good men and bad, will be present. None will be forgotten, none can escape. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." III. **It is awful.** It is attended and followed by convulsions, in which the framework of society shall be shaken, and by symbolic signs in heaven and earth. Countless multitudes assemble in the valley, the heavens above darken with the frown, and the earth beneath trembles at the thunder of God. "The wickedness" of men "is great," and ripe for harvest. The day of judgment, the day of decision and separation, has come. The grain must be gathered into the garner, and the wine into the vats; the worthless chaff consumed, and the wheat preserved. "Thrust in thy sickle and reap; for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe" (Rev. xiv. 15).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 13. May be taken *literally* as a harvest sermon, in proving (1) the power, (2) the providence, and (3) the goodness of God. We think nothing of God's mercy, because the effects of it are common. How faithful to the promise, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest," &c. Every harvest should remind us of the truth of God. *The harvest a type of final judgment.* I. The ripening process. The righteous and the wicked, growing together like tares and wheat for their proper end. II. The state of maturity. 1. Wilful ignorance, sin against conviction, and total insensibility, in some. 2. Growing likeness to Christ, and sincere desire to be with him, in others. III. The reaping. Not before the corn is ripe, is the sickle put in. There are stages of growth in sin and grace. In gradual law and due season

judgment comes. Every act and every day promotes maturity. "The harvest is the end of the world; the reapers are the angels."

Consider the text as addressed—*First*, to ministers of the Word. We are allowed such an application. "The harvest truly is plenteous," &c. Means of usefulness and opportunities are intended by harvest; by labourers, those whose office it is to make use of them. When the grain is ripe, if not gathered in, it is liable to perish. The season for saving it is short and uncertain. Men therefore forego ease, and endure fatigue, to secure it. What is the safety of grain to the salvation of souls! How many destroyed for lack of knowledge! We have religious freedom, means and opportunities for doing good. There are loud calls to preachers, parents, and Christians generally. But the time for work will not continue. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do," &c. *Secondly*, as addressed to public judgments. The people spoken of were ripe for ruin. So with the Canaanites, when their iniquity was full, and Joshua and his army were the reapers. So with the Jews, when Nebuchadnezzar was called to punish and the Romans to destroy them. So with many nations and communities since. *We* have reason for apprehension if we estimate our condition by our guilt, and our guilt by our privileges. God is never at a loss for instruments. Hearts, events, elements, are all his; but threatenings are mercifully conditional. "If that nation against whom I have pronounced turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil I thought to do them." *Thirdly*, as addressed to the messengers of death—accidents, diseases, whatever can bring us to the grave. This regards individuals. We know our own destiny, whatever be that of nations. It is appointed unto each once to die. But *when* men are ripe it is not easy to decide. It is certain that sin ripens for hell but the most grossly and openly vicious are not always the most guilty before God. It is wise to keep from every approximation to such a dreadful state. Surely when a man is insensible under the word; incorrigible under the rebukes of providence; when conscience ceases to reprove, and he can turn Divine things into ridicule, he must be "nigh unto cursing." Holiness ripens for glory, but when matured and meet for it we cannot ascertain. We should think favourably of one dissatisfied with himself, and who esteemed the Lord Jesus; who was anxious to resemble him and trusted to him in all things. But God knows them that are his; chooses the proper time for removing them; the wheat for the barn, and the chaff for the burning. But the end of all things is at hand. *Fourthly*, God thus addresses his angels at the last day. We are sure of the event if ignorant of the period. Then cometh the end; his purposes will be accomplished, his promises and threatenings verified, and all will be ripe. Time will be no longer. The earth will be cleared of all the produce, and the fields in which it grew will be destroyed. "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" [*Jay*].

Ver. 14. The day of the Lord. 1. *Near;* comes suddenly, and may find many unprepared. 2. *Decisive;* cannot be repeated. Every one's doom will be fixed, and the struggle between Satan and God end. "The valley of decision."

Ver. 16. The different aspects of the day to men. I. A terror to God's enemies. "The Lord shall roar." Now he speaks in mercy, then his terrible voice will be like a roaring lion (Is. xlii. 13, 14; Jer. xxv. 30; Amos i. 2). II. A hope to God's people. The material universe may be destroyed, but God will be the refuge of his people. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Ps. cxlvi. 5; Jer. xiv. 8; xvii. 7).

HOMILETICS.

The Unprofaned City.—*Verse* 17.

The scenes which now follow lie beyond the bounds of time. To the trembling universe and the terrors of judgment there succeeds "a kingdom which cannot be moved." God will dwell with his people. Zion will become a holy mount, a sanctuary no more profaned by alien and unrighteous feet. As a description of heaven, the text sets forth:—

I. **Its distinguished glory.** "I am the Lord your God dwelling in Zion." 1. *It is the residence of God.* God dwelt with man in Eden; but sin drove man from God's presence. The tabernacle and the temple were the house of God; but the symbols of the one and the glory of the other have departed. These were only figures of the true residence. Heaven is "the palace of the great King," the pavilion of his splendour, and the place where his honour dwelleth. The Elysian fields of Paganism, and the Paradise of Mohammedanism, were cold and revolting; but "glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." 2. *It is the permanent residence of God.* "God dwelling in Zion." "Permanency adds bliss to bliss," says the poet. Fellowship with God on earth is short, and often interrupted. In heaven he will dwell for ever with his people. It is this which makes heaven itself. What would be all its glory and company without the presence of God? Could the angels and the harps be a substitute for him? O blissful thought, to be "for ever with the Lord," in the "city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."

> Come, join our wing, and we will guide the flight,
> To mysteries of everlasting bliss,
> The tree and fount of bliss, the eternal throne,
> And presence-chamber of the King of kings.

II. **Its happy citizens.** "So shall ye know that I am the Lord your God." 1. *They are enriched.* God is their portion. In heaven there will be access to the most holy, and residence with the most dignified society. Patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs, will be there, but the presence of Christ will be "unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory." *Your God*, as much your own as if possessed by none besides, filling all with gladness, and fully possessed and enjoyed by each. "Thou art my portion, O Lord." 2. *They are intelligent.* God is known to be their God. He is not simply with them, but *known*, seen to be with them. It is a personal, experimental, pre-eminent, and perfect knowledge. We know but little here, and that superficially. "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." In heaven the mental powers will be glorified, study will be a delight, and knowledge will be acquired in direct converse with the objects of knowledge. We shall know by experience, by sight, face to face, what we only believe now. "We see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know as also I am known." 3. *They are holy.* The place is God's "holy mount," and none can enter it but those who are holy. Only those who awake in his likeness will behold his face in righteousness. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Heaven would be hell to the alienated heart, the unrenewed sinner; but "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." To see God and be like him is the earnest desire of God's people. This desire will be gratified in his "holy mount." And if the glad smile of a friend begets joy in the heart, how will the light of God's countenance quicken souls in heaven to a sense of his love! As the light of the sun transcribes its joyous image upon one who contemplates it, so the holiness which beams from the presence of God will purify those upon whom it shines. "One sight of his glorious majesty," says one, "presently subdues and works the soul to a full subjection. One sight of his purity makes it pure. One sight of his loveliness turns it into love." The saints thus become assimilated to

God, whom they perpetually love and adore. "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." III. Its eternal security. "And there shall no strangers pass through her any more." Mount Zion, literally and spiritually, was a place of beauty and stability. "And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established for ever." 1. *No foe to fear.* There will be no enemy to encounter. Death and hell will be overcome. Its possessors will never be subdued and taken captive. "The wicked shall no more pass through thee" (Nah. i. 15). "In that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts." 2. *Nothing to defile.* Profane nations and ungodly men can never enter. There is nothing in heavenly blessedness compared to its moral and holy character. There will be nothing to defile, or capable of being defiled. Not an act, word, or look will be contaminated by evil. "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." 3. *Nothing to corrupt nor decay.* The locust and caterpillar will not destroy. The worm will not devour the heart of ripening fruit. "The sun shall not smite by day, nor the moon by night." On earth, everything is subject to vicissitude and decay; but the joys of heaven are abiding and secure. "Where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." This inheritance will never wear and waste under the gnawing influence of time, nor be destroyed by the constant friction of disturbing forces. It is "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Many take the words as a description of Zion in the millennium. *The metropolis of a converted world.* 1. Its grandeur. God will dwell there. 2. Its sanctity. "Then shall Jerusalem be holy." 3. Its security. 4. Its perpetuity. It will be the scene of delightful privileges and blessings. It will be invested with absolute and inviolable safety. It will possess renown and empire throughout the whole world.

This heavenly city, where Christ's throne is, is called Zion, because there all the expectations which the O. T. saints connected with the earthly Zion will be fulfilled, and because, also, there everything which the Jews associated with the shadowy picture of the earthly Zion is for ever perfected in a glorious actualization. From thence God's gracious kingdom, in all directions, is supplied, preserved, sanctified, and built up by blessings and gifts. For this reason that place is called, in the Epistle to the Galatians, Jerusalem, which is above and free, the mother of all his believing children, the true and eternal metropolis of Christendom [*Harbaugh*].

The words prove—1. That interest in God is the ground of encouragement to the Church. 2. That interest in God is sweetened by God's gracious presence with his people. 3. That interest in God is confirmed by experimental knowledge. "They shall know" (1 Cor. ii. 12). 4. That interest in God is evidenced by holy life. Sanctification is the fruit and end of God's presence (Ps. xciii. 5).

HOMILETICS.

The New World.—*Verses* 18—21.

In these verses, says Lowth, "either the times of the Messiah are described, or we have a description of Jerusalem after its final restoration, when a golden age shall commence among its inhabitants, and when the knowledge of God and his Christ shall a second time be widely diffused from it."

I. The scene of manifold blessings. These blessings are predicted under significant figures. "The mountains drop down new wine and the hills flow with

milk" in rich abundance. Divine influences will attend the preaching of the word, converts shall rapidly increase in number and fruitfulness, the ordinances of religion shall water the land and make it exceedingly productive. "All the rivers of Judah" shall make glad this world of beauty, and streams of pure water shall quench the thirst and quicken the virtues of its people. **II. The abode of perfect happiness.** 1. *Freedom from foes.* Inveterate enemies, as Egypt and Edom, will be destroyed. All opposition, violence, and cruelty to God's people will be at an end. They shall be free from injury and perpetuated to the end of time. 2. *Freedom from barrenness.* "A fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord" to fertilize the most unproductive regions. Temporal blessings shall be accompanied with spiritual blessings without stint or measure. The vivifying and refreshing waters of life shall flow from Christ to bless the capital and the world. "And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be" (Zech. xiv. 8). **III. The residence of righteous people.** The inhabitants will be purged and cleansed from sin. Pollution in general shall be wiped away. Special sins, such as shedding innocent blood, shall be forgiven. Knowledge shall spread, and every one shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest. There will be new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. No strangers will defile nor disturb the peace and prosperity of these happy regions. God will dwell and make his Church a fit residence for his presence and praise. In his presence will be fulness of joy, and at his right hand pleasures for evermore. Seek to be numbered with the saints in glory. While on earth prepare for this glorious era. Help it on by daily effort and incessant prayer.

Teach us in watchfulness and prayer
To wait for the appointed hour;
And fit us by thy grace to share
The triumphs of thy conquering power.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 18. *The glorious fountain.* I. Its source. "The house of the Lord." All springs of grace, comfort, and glory are in God. These blessings take their rise in the sanctuary, like the waters of Ezekiel (xlvii. 1), or those from under the threshold of the temple. The ordinances of God's house are like fountains of joy and refreshment to thirsty souls. II. Its abundance. It is a *fountain*, not a mere spring. An abundance to fill *all the rivers*, lit. *channels of Judah.* Rivers of living water flow from the Spirit (John vii. 38). There is no scarcity of gospel blessings to sinners and saints. III. Its fertility. It creates fertility in the king's gardens (2 Kings xxv. 4; Jer. xxxix. 4). The waters in Christ vivify and refresh the barren spots in the Church. Valleys of Shittim, arid deserts, shall be fruitful. "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High" (Ps. xlvi. 4).

Or if Zion's hill
Delight thee more, or Siloa's fount that flowed
Hard by the oracle of God, I thence
Invoke thine aid to my adventurous song.

Ver. 19. 1. The desolation. In contrast to the fruitfulness of the Church, the curse falls upon open enemies and treacherous friends. The low condition of Egypt and Edom for centuries proves the truth of this prediction (Is. xix. 1; Jer. xlix. 17). So at the second coming of Christ all foes of Israel typified by these nations shall be destroyed. 2. The cause of the desolation. (*a*) Violence to God's people (Ezek. xxv. 12, 13). (*b*) Shedding innocent blood. How highly does God esteem the death of his people, the blood of the faithful. The warning is repeated time after time to deter nations from the danger. In every place where his cause and crown

have been disregarded ruin has followed. Sin blights nations, destroys their palaces, and desolates their land. "Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth." "The three words of Joel, *Egypt shall become desolation*, are more comprehensive than any prophecy, except those by Ezekiel. They foretell that abiding condition, not only by force of the words, but by the contrast with an abiding condition of bliss. The words say, not only 'it shall be desolated,' as by a passing scourge sweeping over it, but it shall 'itself *pass over into* that state;' it shall become what it had not been; and this in contrast with the abiding condition of God's people. The contrast is like that of the Psalmist (Ps. cvii. 33—35). Judah should overflow with blessing, and the streams of God's grace should pass beyond its bounds, and carry fruitfulness to what now was dry and barren. But what should reject his grace should be itself rejected" [*Pusey*].

Ver. 20. *The perpetuity of the Church.* Egypt and Edom, all enemies of God, will come to an end. But the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. No enemy can destroy, no ages consume her. She knows no injury, nor decay. The Church of God shall abide in him and by him on earth, and shall dwell with him for ever.

Ver. 21. This verse has been interpreted in various ways. God would cleanse, or pronounce the blood which had been shed by the enemies to be innocent. This cleansing or sentence would be accomplished by punishing those who shed it. "I will exact full atonement of their enemies for all their oppressions and violence." Or the meaning may be, "I will blot out their own transgressions, so far as these have not already been purged away." In one case, the principle is that guilt cannot be cleansed without complete satisfaction. In the other, that security with God can only be enjoyed by removal of all transgression. Hence *peace and security with God by atonement for guilt.* 1. To the sinner. Guilt must be removed, justice satisfied, and everything taken away which renders him unfit for God's presence. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. 2. To the Church. The security and happiness of the Church depend upon God's presence. God will not dwell with a worldly people. "Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever." God will not dwell with evil, nor will he tolerate it in the believer, or in his house. Only when cleansed from blood are we fit for the dwelling of the Holy God and King.

The crown and seal. *For the Lord dwelleth in Zion.* 1. To sanctify. 2. To be praised. 3. To defend. "And the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there" (Ezek. xlviii. 35).

> The Church has all her foes defied,
> And laughed to scorn their rage;
> E'en thus for aye, she shall abide
> Secure from age to age.

HOMILETICS.

The Final Scene.—iii. 1—21.

The whole of this chapter may be summed up into two parts, of unequal length and graphic description.

I. God's judgment upon the nations. Ver. 1—16. 1. The verdict pronounced in time and place with its nature and ground (ver. 1—8). 2. The sentence executed (ver. 9—16). The call to hear it (ver 9—11); the throne from which it is given (ver. 11 & 12); and the dreadful overthrow which it specifies (ver. 13—16). **II. The final glory of God's kingdom.** Ver. 17—21. 1. The presence of God in it (ver. 17). 2. Its abundant blessings (ver. 18). 3. Its perpetual blessedness (ver. 19—21). This is contrasted with the destruction of its enemies, and all that oppress its subjects. "In fine," says a writer, "the closing chapter of Joel's prophecy is a brief apocalypse, cast in the forms of Hebrew thought and story indeed,

and only dimly bodied out, yet setting forth, in language which even the Jews could not and do not mistake, the terrors of the last judgment, the issue of the time-long struggle of good with evil, and the golden age of peace and fruitful service, which is to succeed to the conflicts and storms of time."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1—3. *Persecution.* Oh, if when we oppress and goad our fellow-creatures, we bestowed but one thought upon the dark evidences of human error, which, like dense and heavy clouds, are rising slowly, it is true, but not less surely, to heaven, to pour their after-vengeance on our heads—if we heard but one instant, in imagination, the deep testimony of dead men's voices, which no power can stifle, and no pride can shut out, where would be the injury and injustice, the suffering, misery, *cruelty*, and wrong, that each day's life brings with it [*Dickens*]?

Sold a girl for wine. A woman in Glasgow, some time since, in order to gratify her immoderate craving for ardent spirits, was said to have offered her own child for sale as a subject for dissection [*Whitecross*].

Ver. 4—8. *Retribution.* Society is like the echoing hills. It gives back to the speaker his words, groan for groan, song for song. Wouldest thou have thy social scenes to resound with music? then speak ever in the melodious strains of truth and love. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" [*Dr Thomas*].

Ver. 9—12. Here, as in other respects, the predictions and promises are but partially fulfilled in the literal Israel. Their real accomplishment, their awful completion, will be when Zion's King comes in glory and majesty, with a rod of iron, to dash in pieces the great antichristian confederacy of kings and peoples, and to take possession of his long-promised and dearly-bought inheritance. The signs of the times seem to indicate that the coming of the Lord draws nigh.

Ver. 12—14. *Judgment day.* Spencer says that two soldiers entered the valley of Jehoshaphat, when one of them said, "In this place shall be the general judgment, and I will now take my place where I shall then sit." He then sat down upon a stone, and looked up to heaven as if to receive his sentence; when such dismay overwhelmed him, that he fell to the earth trembling, and ever after remembered the day of judgment with horror.

Ver. 15, 16. How sublime is this description! How should we adore the God before whom the unconscious earth and sky do reverence, and act as if they knew their Maker! Though the solid world is convulsed at God's presence, saints do not fear. God is their refuge and strength (Ps. xlvi. 1). The enemy will be destroyed, but the Church shall be saved. "She shall not be removed; God shall help her."

> The heavens and earth shall pass away,
> And be to dissolution brought,
> But Zion's strength shall ne'er decay,
> For her Redeemer changeth not.

Ver. 19. A French traveller thus describes this desolation—"Instead of those ancient cultivated and fertile plains, one only finds, here and there, canals filled up, or cut in two, whose numerous ramifications, crossing each other in every direction, exhibit only some scarcely distinguishable traces of a system of irrigation: instead of those villages and populous cities, one sees only masses of bare and arid ruins, remnants of ancient habitations reduced to ashes; lastly, one finds only lagoons, miry and pestilential, or sterile sands, which extend themselves, and unceasingly invade a land, which the industry of man had gained from the desert and the sea."

Ver. 20, 21. The human mind has ever conceived a reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked in a future state. Heaven is all the more resplendent by contrast with the dark back-ground of another state.

> If there's a Power above us
> (And that there is, all Nature cries aloud,
> Through all her works), He must delight in virtue,
> And they, whom he delights in, must be happy.

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

AMOS.

INTRODUCTION

The Prophet. Amos was a native of Tekoah, a village six miles south of Bethlehem, whose ruins are still preserved in the modern name of Tekua. He was a herdsman, not a wealthy sheep-owner; in rather indigent circumstances, but cultivated sycamores for his support (ch. i. 1; vii. 14, 15). He rejected the summons to Judah and eat bread there. He did not prophesy for bread. He was satisfied with his simple fare. He was neither a prophet, nor the pupil of a prophet. He was "a self-made man," employed in humble life, among ordinary men.

The Time. Somewhat earlier than Hosea, yet contemporary with him. Younger than Joel, whose writings he read when composing his own, and from whom he quotes in exact words (ch. i. 2; ix. 13). It is stated that he prophesied in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, &c. (i. 1). This earthquake appears to be the same as that mentioned in Zech. xiv. 5, and Josephus (*Ant.* ix. 10. 4), as a token of Divine displeasure, in addition to leprosy, against Uzziah, for usurping the priest's office. Jotham his son acted as regent during the latter part of his reign (2 Kings xv. 33). As Uzziah and Jeroboam were contemporaries for about 27 years (B. C. 808—782), the latter part of this period will fix the date of Amos. This agrees with ch. vii. 10. This was a period of national splendour and prosperity. Under Jeroboam II. the kingdom of Israel was restored to its ancient limits, and stood at the zenith of its power. But this restoration was followed by the prevalence of luxury, licentiousness, and vice, which provoked the judgment of God. The poor were oppressed (viii. 4); the ordinances of religion felt burdensome (viii. 5); and idleness and extravagance were common (iii. 15). The idolatry of the golden calf was practised at Bethel and Gilgal, Dan and Beersheba; was offensively united with the true worship of Jehovah, and was the source of all their prevalent evils. In the midst of this vice and prosperity, the prophet was called from his seclusion to proclaim judgments, most unlikely and most terrible, the fall of the kingdom of Israel. Judgments upon individual nations, typical of hostile forms to God, and his Church in every age: judgments upon all kinds of corrupt religion in the Church, are given with special emphasis, and comprehensive fulness. In a time of moral corruption, and political security, he was sent to remind nations of a retributive law, and a God of justice.

The Book. We have nine chapters, taking up the words of Joel, and containing threatenings against the kingdom of Israel chiefly. Surrounding nations are briefly noticed, and a promise of deliverance and prosperity is given to Israel. *Its Analysis* is simple. *First*, a solemn prelude (ch. i.—ii. 1—5) to the main subject. Nation after nation is summoned to judgment, with a striking idiomatic expression ("For three transgressions," &c.), similar to Prov. xxx. 15, 18, 21. After the introduction, we have two parts. *In chaps. iii.—vi. we have special charges and threats.* Chap. iii. sets forth the certainty of coming judgment; for the prophet of Jehovah cannot speak in vain. Chap. iv. declares that since previous visitations had been in vain God must punish. In chap. v. we have the outcry of calamity with calls to seek the Lord and escape. Woe is pronounced upon those who desire the day to come, who are not yet prepared for it. Chap. vi. rouses those who fancy the day is far off, and who continue in folly until overtaken. *Then chaps. vii.—ix. recount five visions.* The first two threaten judgments (chap. vii. 1—6); the next two point out the ripeness of the people for them (ch. vii. 7—9; viii. 1—3). Between these a conversation between the prophet and the priest of Bethel is given (ch. vii. 10—17). The substance of the fourth vision ends in a simple prophetic address (ch. viii. 4—14). The fifth vision (ch. ix. 1), the overthrow and ruin of Israel, is expanded to an address (ver. 2—10), to which is appended the promise of restoration to the fallen kingdom, its extension in Gentile nations, and its eternal glorification. The close points to the beginning of the book, which seems "a grand panorama of God's judicial majesty."

Its Style indicates vigour of mind and great moral culture. Images are taken from country life in abundance and originality. The earth with its vineyards, the heavens with lights, and cities in their luxury, impart beauty to his conceptions. Historical events and national customs show that he was a student of the law as well as "a child of nature." He read the relations of the physical to the moral, and wonderfully combined the justice and the mercy of God. Minute conceptions express the deep experience of the writer. He was a man of prayer and moral courage. He scorned mere forms of worship, and felt that repentance was spiritual work. He valued Divine revelation, and for the thunder of reproof or the gentle tones of mercy to be silent was to him the greatest of evils. We shall try to bring out the hidden beauties of his language, apply his lessons to events of the present day, and by God's help, in a method in which no other writer has yet employed.

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Amos**] Different from the father of Isaiah, *Amots*. **Tek.**] 2 Chron. xx. 20 **Earth.**] 2 Chron. xxvi. 16. A premonitory sign in nature of revolutions in guilty kingdoms (Matt. xxiv. 7, 8). **2. Roar**] Cf. Joel iii. 16; Jer. xxv. 30. God will spread terror like beasts of prey (Ps. xviii. 3). **Zion**] Seat of government from whence they revolted. **Hab.**] Poetical for inhabitants. **Carmel**] whose summit abounded in olives and rich pastures; owing to its nearness to the sea, renewed its freshness and verdure (Song vii. 5; Is. xxxiii. 9; Jer. l. 19). **3. Three**] The numbers serve to denote the multiplicity of sins, "ungodliness in its worst form" [*Luther*]. **Turn**] Reverse, to make a thing go back, to withdraw it (Num. xxiii. 20; Is. xliii. 13). **4. A fire**] Material, as cities burned in war (Ps. lxxviii. 63); or an emblem of God's judgments. **5. Bar**] of its gates (Jer. li. 30). **Inhab.**] Subject. **Him that holdeth**] Ruler. **Saith**] Strengthens the threat, which was fulfilled when the Assyrian king conquered Damascus and broke up the kingdom (2 Kings xvi. 9). **6. Whole captivity**] *i. e.* left none, but sold them to Edomites, the most deadly enemies to Israel: hence the greatness of the sin. **7. Fire on the wall**] An enemy shall destroy it. Fulfilled by Hezekiah (2 Kings xviii. 8), Sennacherib (Is. xlvii. 1), and by Alexander the Great. **9, 10. Tyrus**] The crime here is sale of prisoners, like the preceding, to Edom; a violation of the covenant of David and Solomon with the king of Tyre (2 Sam. v. 11; 1 Kings v. 1; ix. 11). **11, 12. Edom**] No particular crime, but implacable hatred charged, which broke out into acts of cruelty. **13—15. Ammon**] Ammonites joined the Chaldeans to invade and plunder Judea. Hazael perpetrated the cruelty predicted (2 Kings viii. 12). **Ripped up**] A cruel act, done to leave Israel without heir, so as to secure the inheritance. The punishment is by foreign invasion, swift, sudden, and resistless as a tempest; violent and terrific as a whirlwind. **King**] "Their Moloch (the idol of Ammon) and his priests" [*Grotius* and *LXX.*]. Or, as the English, their king and his princes would go together into captivity. The reigning head and those who shared his counsels were removed. Their idols and their earthly kings were unable either to save themselves, or those who submitted to them. "Hand in hand the wicked shall not be unpunished" (Prov. xi. 21).

HOMILETICS.

THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE.—*Verses* 1, 2.

Amos uttered words which were the embodiment of Divine communications in vision. When engaged in the daily routine of homely duties he received a Divine summons, "Go, prophesy unto my people Israel." His predictions are wonderful. It was a strange event for a prophet to be sent out of Judah into the kingdom of the ten tribes. For a man of no training and position, to rise up from the rank of a shepherd, and foretell the destruction of a prosperous and powerful nation. This would demand universal attention.

I. **The Word of God often comes to men of humble birth.** "The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa." Amos was only a common shepherd and a fig-cultivator. A man of no learning and connection in life. Yet the call came to him. We pander to the prejudice of sects, regard the opinion of the great, and fear the scorn of the ignorant. Most popular and talented men of the times are sought to render our cause welcome to the people. But God "chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." The proud and mighty are passed by, and men from the dunghill are exalted to the throne and the ministry. Elisha from the plough, David from the sheepfold, Matthew from the receipt of custom, and Peter from the fishing-net, are selected to be messengers for God. Christ made publicans and fishermen apostles to men. The philosophers of Greece and the senators of Rome were passed by. "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree." Men of the greatest eminence and usefulness have risen from the lowest ranks. God knows the "right men" for the times, finds them, and puts them into "the right place." Many are now cultivating high qualities in humble callings, despised and unknown, but whom God is preparing for more honourable spheres.

This law, though custom now directs the course,
As nature's institute, is yet in force,
Uncancelled, though diffused: and he whose mind
Is virtuous, is alone of noble kind;
Though poor in fortune, of celestial race,
And he commits the crime who calls him base.

II. The call from God often takes men from a lower to a higher sphere of life. A humble shepherd was sent to warn the kings of Israel. Some men are discontented in their place, think they deserve a higher, and cherish ambitious schemes for the future. But if we are not faithful in little we shall not be in great things. "First deserve and then desire." If we fill our present position with diligence, faith, and earnestness, we are on the way to honour. "Merit well the honour and you shall obtain it." "The force of his own merit makes his way." Moses was a faithful servant in his own house before he became master in Israel. Our secular avocations are sacred and should not be despised, filled with grand possibilities and elevate to higher blessings. God speaks to men in business, awakens dormant powers, and calls to distinguished honour. Cincinnatus was called from the plough to the dictatorship. Matthew from the toll-booth, and Peter from his boat, were called to follow Christ and become historians and ambassadors of the age. Work in your daily tasks and trust God for the future. "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one and setteth up another." **III. The call from God often comes to men in special times.** "In the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam." "Judge a man by the times in which he lived," is a common saying. If we thus estimate the prophet Amos, we learn his moral courage and intense feeling as he delivers the burden of the Lord. He was accused of conspiracy and advised to flee, but defends his innocence and authority, and with the heroism of God's servant repeats the unpleasant message, and unfolds the Divine displeasure. In shepherd's dress he denounced the idolatry of the court, foretold the destruction of the kingdom and the captivity of the people. 1. *Times of natural prosperity.* During the vigorous reign of Jeroboam II. the kingdom of Israel enlarged its dominions by the subjugation of adjoining states. With greater security from without, and firmer administration within, there were profound peace, material prosperity, and social gratification. Uzziah also had subdued the Edomites and the Philistines, and made the Ammonites pay tribute. He fortified Jerusalem, and raised a powerful army. His name had spread even to Egypt (2 Chron. xxvi.). Under these kings the two kingdoms had reached the summit of their power and splendour. 2. *Times of moral corruption.* National prosperity is no guarantee for pure religion. It often begets indifference, love of ease, and maturity for judgment. "Prosperous times" are very often the least prosperous. Idolatry was sanctioned by the State, and mixed with the worship of God. The luxuries, debaucheries, and reckless conduct of the rich were upheld by oppressing the poor (ch. ii. 7, 8; iii. 9). Perversion of justice (ch. ii. 7; v. 7), bribery (ch. ii. 6; v. 12), and false measures abounded. In business a griping, hardfisted bargain was sought (ch. viii. 5, 6). Everywhere in the events of life, sin showed itself in the vile price given for articles of luxury (ch. ii. 6; viii. 6). In the palace and the sanctuary, from the metropolis to the borders, moral corruption prevailed. But Amos thundered out the word of God amid the splendour and wickedness that surrounded him. He sets before them their sins and pronounces God's sentence upon them. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel. Therefore the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord saith thus" (iii. 11; iv. 12; v. 16). 3. *Times of physical events.* "Two years before the earthquake." Earthquakes are sometimes natural harbingers of coming revolutions. When men are steeped in sin and living in utter carelessness God has many means to rouse them from sleep. When

they disregard his word, unnatural and extraordinary signs proclaim his anger. This earthquake must have been very great. It is described as "*the* earthquake," and was vividly remembered in the days of Zechariah. Whole cities, like Lisbon, are destroyed by earthquakes in the East, says a writer. Josephus says that in one, a little before the time of Christ, "some ten thousand were buried under the ruined houses." Referring to this he says, "By it half of a mountain was removed and carried to a plain four furlongs off, and spoiled the king's gardens." But in this shaking of the earth we hear the voice of God warning nations of their danger, before the flash falls and the fire consumes them. **IV. The call which comes from God to men is often a call to deliver an unpleasant message.** "The Lord will roar from Zion and utter his voice from Jerusalem." Many are willing to deliver pleasant tidings, to preach "smooth things;" but few have the courage and self-denial to go in the face of public opinion, and declare the truth at the risk of their lives. Amos had to denounce judgments, which are often as necessary as mercies. They both have one aim, and to separate them indicates perverted views of the Divine character and procedure. 1. *Judgments authoritative in their origin.* "From Zion" and from Jerusalem, where God dwelt and was worshipped. Neither in Bethel nor in Dan, nor in the cities of Samaria and Jezreel, but in the cities of Israel did God manifest himself. Zion was the seat of government and the centre of mercy. From thence issued edicts and decrees for Israel and the world. At the very beginning, therefore, the prophet warned Israel, and declared the name and authority of Jehovah, King in Zion. "The Lord shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation." 2. *Judgments loud in their nature.* Jehovah will roar against them as a lion, terrible to shepherds and their flocks. His voice must be heard, and the message demands attention. God roars before he tears, and warns before he strikes. "Thus hath the Lord spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof." 3. *Judgments specific in their design.* "Concerning Israel." "All troubles," says Bishop Reynolds, "have their commission and instructions from him—what to do, whither to go, whom to touch, and whom to pass over." The storm passed over adjacent countries, but at last falls down in terrific power and darkness upon the kingdom of Israel. None are beyond the reach or can escape from the punishment of God. The arrows of the Almighty never miss their mark, and stick fast into those at whom they are shot. Sent in love or judgment, they cause a wound which only he can heal. Under his power and presence men are stricken down, and the slain of the Lord are many when he leads in war. Those who sin against light and privileges deserve greater judgment than others. Israel's advantages were great, and Israel's sins were grievous. "Go, prophesy unto my people Israel." 4. *Judgments terrible in their consequence.* This is read in the terms which describe them. Not only like the roaring of a lion from his secret place, but like the outburst of a thunder-storm, which sweeps over the land, and carries desolation in its train. (*a*) *The land is smitten.* Its fruitful portions are made barren. The summit of Carmel, denoted for its fertility and excellency, was consumed by drought. All herbage and verdure withered like a flower. "Sharon is like a wilderness; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits" (Isa. xxxiii. 9). (*b*) *The habitations of men suffer.* "The habitations of the shepherds shall mourn." This is not mere poetic personification. The shepherds mourn at withered pastures, and their habitations are made desolate by the general calamity. Nature, beasts and men, feel the visitation, and mourn in sorrow. God can blight the fairest blessings of men. When "the earth mourneth and languisheth," let us weep in penitence and turn from sin.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

The same lessons are here repeated and enforced that we have found elsewhere. 1. Those who take no heed to one message may have others louder. (*a*) Given by strange men. (*b*) Confirmed by extraordinary signs in nature. 2. But God is slow to anger, and waits patiently. Before the last punishment is inflicted real space is given for repentance. "Two years before the earthquake." 3. If all warning is despised, the ministry of the prophet and the sufferings of nature, then there is "fearful looking for of judgment," &c. The populous cities, the peaceful homes, and the fruitful fields will all suffer when God speaks in wrath.

The shepherd has shaken, not one country, but the world; not by a passing earthquake, but by the awe of God, which, with electric force, streamed through his words [*Pusey*]

Ver. 1. It is observable that Amos, the shepherd of Tekoa, south of Bethlehem in Judah, directs his prophecies specially to the ten tribes of Israel. He thus presents an example of Divine kindness and tender sympathy for aliens and rebels; and in this respect is like the Good Shepherd, who was born at Bethlehem, and laid down his life for his sheep when they had gone astray [*Wordsworth*].

God chooses instruments for important service from inferior stations in society. 1. Men should not be ashamed of their mean extraction, or low occupations in life. Some have childishly wished to blot out every incident concerning their origin. Rousseau, a French lyric poet, is said to have been ashamed that he was the son of a shoemaker. 2. Men should not be reproached for former life, if they earnestly discharge the duties of their present position. 3. God thus magnifies his grace, and rebukes human pride. It is a false notion of true dignity and usefulness, to suppose that they belong to an illustrious pedigree or a long purse.

Honour and shame from no condition rise:
Act well your part—there all the honour lies.

Ver. 2. *Roar from zion.* Thus Amos joins on his own prophecy of judgment to that of Joel (iii. 16). God roared out of Zion by the voice of Joel, and of Amos himself, denouncing his judgments. And God roared by the voice of the earthquake, confirming that denunciation by a solemn peal of subterranean thunder. The earthquake, as it were, an *Amen* to the prophecy [*Wordsworth*].

Mourn. Amos, like Joel, notes the sympathy of the natural world with man in his sorrow. He also displays his own sympathy for the class to which he belonged, by remembering the home which he loved and now left.

HOMILETICS.

The Judgment on Damascus.—*Verses* 3—5.

The prophet having declared the object of his mission, and the authority by which he was sent, now gives the several messages in order. *First* to the surrounding nations, grouped together into two classes. Damascus (Syria), Gaza (Philistia), and Tyre, more distantly related to Israel; Edom, Ammon, and Moab allied in origin, and nearer to Israel. *Then* to Judah, and *finally* to Israel herself, the chief transgressor. In the succession of groups we see a climax of guilt.

I. The guilt of Damascus. "For three transgressions of Damascus and for four." All the judgments are introduced by the same formula, which does not mean that four transgressions were added to three, but that there was a series of sins, each one greater than the one before it, and the last the greatest, the climax of all. All these nations were guilty of multiplied sins. We notice those specially mentioned in each case. Damascus, that is, the Syrians under the reign of Hazael,

invaded and subdued the eastern regions of Israel. They treated the captured Gileadites with great cruelty, and crushed them under iron threshing-machines (2 Kings x. 32, 33; viii. 12). Elisha foretold this cruelty, and Hazael actually did it, though he stood aghast at the prediction. The women of Israel were thrown like sheaves on the threshing-floor. **II. The punishment of Damascus.** 1. *It is irreversible.* "I will not turn away the punishment thereof." There are antecedent stages when the consequences may be averted. There are times of warning and patient waiting. But when men abuse God's patience, and continue in sin till there be no remedy, they must reap what they deserve. 2. *It is wide-spread.* (*a*) *The royal palaces are destroyed.* "I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Benhadad." Royal palaces, though richly furnished and strongly built, avail nothing before God. The habitations of the rich are no protection against the wrath of God. They turn to dust and ashes before the fire. (*b*) *The capital is made defenceless.* "I will break also the bar of Damascus." The bar, the gates of the city were broken. It was exposed to the enemy, who could go in and out at pleasure. The seat of empire and the empire itself was shorn of its strength. All means of resistance were shivered Disgrace and ruin followed. "Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap" (Is. xvii. 1). (*c*) *The inhabitants greatly suffered.* Some were cut off by the sword. The people from the plain of Aven and princes from the house of Eden, the inhabitants of the valley and the cities, were put to death. Neither their wealth nor their gods could protect them. Others were taken captives to the land of Kir, an Assyrian province on the banks of the river Kir, the modern Georgia. This was accomplished when the king of Assyria took Damascus, and carried away its people into captivity (2 Kings xvi. 9). How easily can God uproot and transplant a nation that sins against him, and acts with cruelty towards his people! Those who abuse the power which God bestows upon them to uproot others, shall themselves be uprooted.

THE JUDGMENT ON GAZA.—*Verses* 6—8.

In similar terms as before, the special sins of the leading and most influential city of the Philistines are mentioned. Sin in every place grows and ripens for punishment.

I. The sins of Gaza. "For three transgressions," &c. 1. The provocations were *great in kind.* They are called transgressions, or rebellions. 2. The provocations were *multiplied in number.* The sins were not few, but many, and multiplied. "For three and for four," that is, for continued provocations against God Sin was continually added to sin. 3. The provocations reached a *climax in their cruelty towards the Jews.* "Because they carried away captive the whole captivity. to deliver them up to Edom." (*a*) This captivity *was most complete.* The term "whole captivity" means "a full captivity." The captives were numerous. They took all they could and left none behind. They intended to destroy Israel entirely. "They have said, Come and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance" (Ps. lxxxiii. 4). (*b*) This captivity *was most cruel.* The Philistines appear to have sold their victims partly to the Edomites, the bitterest foes of Israel, and partly to the Phœnicians, who resold them to Edom (ver. 9) and to the Grecians (Joel iii. 6). Amos emphasizes the hatred of the Philistines. They were not satisfied with taking them captives themselves, but added affliction to affliction, by delivering the Jews into the hands of implacable foes. Fugitives who flee to us for refuge should never be treated with cruelty nor robbed of their liberty. "It was like driving the shrinking flock of sheep to the butcher's shambles," says a writer, reeking with the gore of their companions. Yet were they driven there to the slaughter. Open markets there were for Jewish slaves in abundance. "Sell us only not to slaughter," "Spare the gray-headed," "Spare my child," would go up in the ears of those, who though

enemies understood their speech. But no! Such was the compact of Tyre, and Philistia, and Edom against the people of God. Not one was to be spared; it was to be a *complete captivity*, and that to *Edom*. The bond was fulfilled. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he too shall cry and not be heard." II. **The doom of Gaza.** "Behold, I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, which shall devour the palaces thereof." The sentence upon Gaza stands out prominently, because the first city in power and in sin. It was the merchant city of the five. Each had its own petty king. But all formed one whole, and were involved in one sin and ruin. As they had treated Israel, so God would deal with them. Measure for measure. "He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy." 1. *Gaza and affiliated cities would be destroyed.* The ravages of fire and sword would devour the palaces of the land. Cities strong by nature and art would be smitten by the fire, when human foresight would pronounce them impregnable and secure. 2. *The people were doomed to perish.* So complete would be the destruction that "the remnant," those who were left after one destruction, should fall in the other. The political strength which escaped one calamity should be overtaken in another. God will make a full end of those who sought to exterminate his people. Judgment upon judgment fell upon Philistia, until they ceased to be a nation (Jer. xlvii.). Cruelty to the helpless, and persecution of God's people, ripen nations and individuals for destruction with great rapidity. Flourishing families and magnificent palaces are destroyed, as if by tremendous fire. Fortified cities are leveled to the dust, fertile regions are depopulated, princes are dethroned, and mighty empires are reduced to slavery and ruin. "Rejoice not thou, whole Philistia, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent."

The Judgment on Tyre.—*Verses* 9, 10.

The third people spoken against are the inhabitants of Tyre.

I. **The ground of the judgment.** Like other nations they were guilty of many sins. 1. *They trafficked in human souls.* If they did not carry away, "they delivered up the whole captivity" to the mortal enemy of the Jews. They sold their captives to Grecians far away (Joel iii. 3), and cared not for the hardships of those who fled to them for shelter. 2. *They violated the sacred covenant.* "And remembered not the brotherly covenant." David and Solomon entered into a friendly alliance with the king of Tyre (2 Sam. v. 11; 1 Kings v. 15). Hiram supplied Solomon with timber and carpenters in return for oil and corn; recognized David as chosen of God, and was "ever a lover of David" (1 Kings v. 1). The covenant no doubt recognized God as the true God, and guaranteed religious privileges, undisturbed peace and safety. No king of Israel or Judah had ever made war with Phœnicia. Yet they forgot this friendly feeling, and remembered not the brotherly covenant. They sinned in helping Edom in their vile trade; in forgetting their solemn obligation, and in disregarding God for the sake of mercantile gain. A costlier object than man does not exist. He who seeks to enrich himself by the possession and traffic of his fellow-creatures will be branded as a pest to humanity.

> God gave us over beast, fish, fowl,
> Dominion absolute; that right we hold
> By his donation; but man over man
> He made not lord, such title to himself
> Reserving—human left for human free.

II. **The nature of the punishment.** "I will send a fire on the wall of Tyrus, which shall devour the palaces thereof." Many parts of Tyre were burnt by fiery missiles of the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar. He took it after a thirteen years' siege. Alexander of Macedon subsequently overthrew it. "Note," says

one, "that though the crime charged may have been immediately due to the greed of the merchants of Tyre, acting in their private capacity, the whole community is held responsible for their deeds. It is the duty of every State to restrain and punish the unjust aggressions of its citizens on other communities, and if it fails to do so, it must abide the consequences."

The Judgment of Edom.—*Verses* 11, 12.

Edom and the two following nations were related to Israel by lineal descent. But they set aside the ties of blood, and perpetrated abominable cruelties.

I. The reason of the judgment. A relentless hatred towards God's people, breaking out in acts of cruelty, from one generation to another. 1. It was *unnatural hatred.* "Did cast off all pity." His better feelings were subdued. Natural pity for a brother in distress was stifled or suppressed as if pity were evil in itself, and to be extinguished within us. This is most sinful and unnatural. It corrupts, deadens a man's feelings, and "steels him against sympathy with others." "For pity melts the mind to love." "Compassion is an emotion of which we ought never to be ashamed," says *Blair.* "Graceful is the tear of sympathy, and the heart that melts at the tale of woe; we should not permit ease and indulgence to contract our affections, and wrap us up in a selfish enjoyment. But we should accustom ourselves to think of the distresses of human life, of the solitary cottage, the dying parent, and the weeping orphan." 2. It was *cruel hatred.* "He did pursue his brother with the sword." His malice destroyed his compassion. He cast off the pity of man and indulged in the fierceness of a beast. His anger was insatiable and knew no bounds. "Fierce are the wars of brethren; and they who love exceedingly also hate exceedingly," says the proverb. No hatred seems so intense as that between relations and brothers. To slay a neighbour is to slay a man, and to pursue a brother is fratricide. "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" 3. It was *perpetual hatred.* "His anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever." Their enmity was intensified by their kinship, and the murderous thoughts of Esau towards Jacob seemed to be revived in posterity, and become a prominent feature in national character (Ezek. xxxv. 5; Obad. 1). Wrath was not kept in restraint, but let loose like a raging beast. It was hereditary, full of revenge, which they gratified by outrageous cruelties. "Thou hast had a perpetual hatred, and hast shed the blood of the children of Israel, by the force of the sword in the time of their calamity." II. The character of the judgment. Their cities would be overthrown, and their capital destroyed by fire. God may forbear awhile, even with the worst persecutors, but their cruelty will at length bring vengeance to their own doors. "The fire of our anger against our brethren kindles the fire of God's anger against us," says an old writer. "For I have sworn by myself, saith the Lord, that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse" (Jer. xlix. 13).

The Judgment on Ammon.—*Verses* 13—15.

In the fifth place the Ammonites are accused of guilt, and their punishment is described.

I Their crimes, consisted in most atrocious deeds towards the Gileadites. 1. *Barbarous cruelty.* "They have ripped up the women with child." Hazael and Ammon were guilty of this barbarity. Probably Syria and Ammon were leagued together for the extermination of Israel. The offspring of the incest of Lot ever retained the stamp of their origin, and were noted for sensuality and ferocity. One would think that human beings could not become so inhuman, but history opens its pages of darkness and blood. 2. *Unbounded selfishness.* "That they might enlarge their border." These deeds were not only performed in rage, but in deliberate design to extirpate the people and take possession of the land. Covet

ambition leads to great cruelty, and those that seek to extend their borders often use unscrupulous means to accomplish their design. Pharaoh killed the Israelites, and Ammon displayed unwonted ferocity towards the women of Gilead. But neither their kings nor their idols could protect them from the coming storm. II. Their punishment. Their attempts to exterminate others recoiled upon themselves. 1. *Their chief city was burned.* "I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah." It was a strong city with a stronger citadel, but it was utterly destroyed. Its ruins still exist, some of which perhaps date back to this prophecy. "I will make Rabbah a stable for camels, and the Ammonites a couching place for flocks." 2. *War desolated the country.* "Shouting in the day of battle." Foreign invasion would sweep the land like a storm. (*a*) *Swift* as a tempest. (*b*) *Violent* as a whirlwind. The onset would be irresistible. Like the hurricane carrying the caravans of the desert, so the enemy would carry the walls and fortress of the city. 3. *Kings and princes were taken into captivity.* There would be no one left to resist and renew the revolt. On every side waste land and ruined cities. All defences, human and religious, were impotent. Inhabitants and gods were carried into a foreign country. Kings and counsellors, priests and people, linked together and driven to one common destruction. "Cry, ye daughters of Rabbah, gird you with sackcloth; lament and run to and fro by the hedges, for their king shall go into captivity, and his priests and his princes together" (Jer. xlix. 3).

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1. *Station in life.* Low station is no obstacle to God's favour. St John was the son of a fisherman; recommended to our Saviour neither by refinement of education nor by honourable employment, he was diligently engaged in the labours of an humble occupation when chosen to accompany his Lord. For those, indeed, whom it hath pleased God to place in the higher states of life it is right that they should endeavour to perform the duties of their stations, by a due cultivation of their talents, by the acquirement of suitable accomplishments, and by acting up to the rank in society to which by the good providence of God they are born and designated [*Bp Manton*].

Ver. 9. *Brotherly covenant.* Be steadfast in thy covenant, and be conversant therein, and wax old in thy work (Eccles. xi. 20). Remember thy covenants, and bear no malice to thy neighbour (*Ibid.* xxviii. 7).

Ver. 11. *Cast off pity.* Bonaparte carried the town of Jaffa by assault, and many of the garrison were put to the sword. But the greater part fled into mosques, implored mercy from their pursuers, and were granted their lives. But Napoleon expressed resentment at the conduct of the troops, lost all pity, and to relieve himself of the care of his prisoners, ordered nearly 4000 to march on rising ground to be shot. When Bonaparte saw the smoke from volleys of musketry and grape, it is said that he could not contain his joy.

> Pity is the virtue of the law,
> And none but tyrants use it cruelly.

Ver. 13. Heathenism is cruel, and multitudes of victims have been destroyed under the sanction of the gods. But what can we say when kings and enlightened nations commit such deeds as these?

> "What will not ambition and revenge descend to?"

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Bones]** An act of cruelty revenged; others, an insult to the remains of a dead king, probably the king joined in alliance with Jehoshaphat and Jehoram (2 Kings iii. 9). **2. Kir.]** A principal city of Moab, the plural form indicates the acropolis and town (cf. Jer. xlviii. 24, 41). **Tumult]** These expressions describe the city taken by storm. **Trumpet]** The signal for assault. **3. Judge]** Supreme magistrate (Deut. xvii. 9). **4. Judah]** condemned for idolatry and despising the law, i. e. the instructions and revelations given by God to his people. **Command.]** Separate precepts. **Lies]** Their idols, which not only deceive, "but as fabrications and nonentities, having no reality in themselves, and therefore quite unable to perform what was expected of them." [*Keil*]. **Fathers]** Forefathers generally. **6. Israel]** The ten tribes the main object of the prophecy. First, prevalent crimes of injustice and oppression, shameless immorality, and daring contempt of God. **6—8. Sold]** Perverted their cause, and gave an unjust sentence for a small bribe (Deut. xvi. 9). **Shoes]** Lit. sandals. Needless ornament was thought more valuable than man. **Pant]** Eagerly thirst (Ecc. i. 5) for this object, i. e. they long to see the head of the poor covered with dust or earth, or to reduce them to such misery that they scatter dust upon their head (cf **Job ii. 12; 2 Sam. i. 2). Turn] bend, bring them into a trap, cast them into destruction,** or impediments laid in their path. **Unto]** Not so much as named among the Gentiles (1 Cor. v. 1). **Clothes]** pawned; upper garments or square piece of cloth, to wrap all around and serve the poor for a counterpane. If a poor man was necessitated to pledge this garment, it was returned to him before night (Ex. xxii. 25); and a garment so pawned was not to be slept upon (Deut. xxiv. 12, 13) Godless usurers kept them to stretch themselves upon at feasts, at sacrificial meals in the temple. **Wine]** bought with money of those whom they unjustly fined. **9—12. Yet]** Former benefits make ingratitude more base. Israel delivered from Egypt and from the most powerful enemy of all the Canaanites. **Roots]** Destroyed utterly, no fruit above, no root from which to spring beneath. **Raised up]** additional privileges; furnished with religious instructors and examples of self-restraint. **Gave]** Tempted the Nazarite to break his vow. **13—16.** Judgment the inevitable consequence. **Press]** I will depress your place, *i. e.* make it narrow, opposite to enlarging or relieving (Ps. iv. 1; Prov. iv. 12); others, I will press you down. It is a rustic figure, a cart full of sheaves sets forth the pressure of their provocations. God was weary of them (Is. xliii. 24; Mal. ii. 17), overlaid with their wickedness [*Bp Hall*]. Neither agility of man or horse, neither courage nor valour, would deliver them; few would escape, and those few would be fugitives in other countries, or naked captives in the hands of the enemy.

HOMILETICS.

THE JUDGMENT ON MOAB.—*Verses* 1—3.

I. The punishment of Moab. Moab was to be laid waste by the fire of war, and its palaces to be destroyed. 1. *A tumultuous destruction.* "Moab shall die with tumult." The sound of the trumpet would stir up the assailants. Noise and commotion would be heard in the streets, and as they had raised tumults themselves so they would perish by tumults. "Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise." 2. *An entire destruction.* God will cut off its rulers. The chief magistrate, the princes and the rulers of all ranks, shall be taken. Those who are high in rank and authority are bound to do justice to the people. Judges should learn that there is one above them, from whose judgment they cannot escape. **II. The reason of this punishment.** "Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime." The king of Moab, either when he sought to avenge himself on Edom (after the raising of the siege, 2 Kings iii. 27), or at some other time, let out his fury on the very dead. The malice which vents itself on the insensible corpse is the vindictive rage of one, that would never cease to hurt if possible. "Hatred which death cannot extinguish," says Pusey, "is the beginning of the eternal hate of hell." To rage against the living, or to express malignant spite against the remains of the dead, is odious to God. He is Lord of the living and the dead. His dominion and providence extend beyond the grave, and he will avenge insults to heathen or Christian.

THE JUDGMENT ON JUDAH.—*Verses* 4, 5.

I. The charge against Judah. The guilt here is not as in other cases. Other nations were judged for injuries done to man; but Judah for insults to God They despised the law, deceived themselves and one another with false excuses and the customs of progenitors. Disregard to God is manifested in two chief forms. 1. *Contempt for the law of God.* "They have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept his commandments." The law as a rule of life and the commandments in their special bearing were treated with contempt. The wisdom of God was *despised* by the pride of man. They first neglected, then set aside, the law. If men have no regard for the law, and make no conscience of its authority, they will soon resist it. If we do not keep we virtually despise God's law. 2. *Worship of idols.* Man will either worship God or love a lie. If he tries to explain away the claims of God and to justify his sins, he will "err" by his lies and soon lose power to discriminate between good and evil. (*a*) *Idolatry is a lie.* The idols themselves are lies. They can do nothing, but lie and deceive. "For an idol is nothing in the world" (1 Cor. viii. 4). The pretences under which men worship them are lies; snares to mislead and cause "to err." (*b*) *Lies lead men astray.* "Their lies caused them to err." God's law is the truth, but when the truth is changed into a lie, there is danger of sin becoming hereditary. The word points the way to temporal and eternal safety; but if despised, men wander into darkness and idolatry. (*c*) *Lies are sometimes defended by custom.* "After the which their fathers have walked." Men get accustomed to evils that are common. These evils acquire prominence and authority. "The popular error of one generation becomes the axiom of the next. Human opinion is as dogmatic as revelation. The second generation of error demands as implicit submission as God's truth. The transmission of error against himself, God says, aggravates its evil, and does not excuse it." Thus children walk in the steps and fill up the measure of the guilt of their fathers. Human opinion must not be exalted above God's word. Scripture, and Scripture alone, is the law of truth, and the rule of life. False doctrines, delusive rites and idolatries, violate the word of God, perpetuate human tradition in the Church, and cause one generation after another to err from the truth. **II. The calamities upon Judah.** In few words and little detail, the destruction by fire is said to extend not only to the cities of Judah, but to the palaces of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was burnt with fire by the Chaldæans (2 Kings xxv. 9; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 19), and afterwards by the Romans. Two centuries elapsed before the first fire destroyed the city, but God sent it. Let us beware of treating the word with contempt, of thinking because long delayed the judgment will never come. God's anger will consume dead members in the Church, and purify it from all idolatry and abominations. "Then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

1. A visible Church which does not keep up communion with God, nor improve her spiritual advantages, may fall into provocations nothing inferior in number and heinousness to the iniquities of nations about her. 2. And if God does not spare heathens without law and with but little knowledge of God, far less will he spare his people who are lewd as they [*Hutcheson*]

"Man first in act *despises* God's law (and whoso does not keep it, despises it), and then he must needs be deceived by some idol of his own, which becomes his god. He first chooses wilfully his own *lie*, i. e. whatever he chooses out of God, and then his own *lie* deceives him So, morally, liars at last believe themselves" [*Pusey*].

Judgments of God compared to fire

1. Fire consumes (Ps. xviii. 8; Jer. xv. 14). 2. Fire breaks out suddenly. The destruction of these cities is certain and inevitable. 3. Fire is violent. Sodom and the great fire in London. 4. Fire refines. The judgments of God are intended to try men, to purify churches and nations. "The Lord's fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem" (Is. xxxi. 9; Zech. xiii. 9).

HOMILETICS.

The Judgment upon Israel.—*Verses* 6—16.

The storm which has been gathering all around, and threatening nation after nation, now falls upon the ten tribes of Israel. Their sins are minutely specified, and the terrific consequences follow.

I. The guilt of Israel. Several atrocious crimes are charged upon them, some of which are sanctioned and upheld by persons of rank and authority. 1. *They perverted justice.* The smallest bribe would induce the judges to give up a poor man to the will of his oppressor. The debtor and the insolvent received no mercy from his creditor. The righteousness of a man's character or cause was no plea for justice. Magistrates neither feared God nor regarded man. Man made in God's image was sold for some worthless price or some trivial ornament. All nations more or less have honoured the sentiment of justice. In the administration of law it is the glory of a people, and in commercial life the bonds of society. In a moral sense it gains respect from man and approval from God. But injustice in whatever form or degree, bribery for any cause, drags the ermine in the dust, and damages the interests of a nation. The national character of Rome in the degenerate period when the judges received bribes had lost its purity and honour. When the Jews sold the righteous Son of God for thirty pieces of silver, they perverted judgment, disgraced humanity, and filled up the measure of their iniquity. "And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise and perverteth the words of the righteous." 2. *They oppressed the poor.* "That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor." They brought the poor into such misery that they strewed dust on their heads in sorrow, or they sank into the dust and perished through oppression. The least property of the poor excited their cupidity, and some think that they "grudged him even the *dust* which as a mourner he strewed on his head, since it too was *earth*." They turned "aside the way of the meek," injured their character, invaded their rights, and put hindrances in their path. It is sad when men take pleasure in trampling upon the poor, and grudge servants the smallest luxury and advantage. Those who rob others to increase their own store, who act unjustly and over-reach the simple and meek, "will receive the greater condemnation." God will reckon with them. "Riches profit not in the day of wrath." "What shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth what shall I answer him?" 3. *They practised incest.* "A man and his father will go in unto the same maid." Prostitution was a part of the filthy worship of idols, and the damsel spoken of is probably one of the prostitutes belonging to the temple. This sin was most abominable and worthy of death. Cf. Lev. xviii. 7, 15; xx. 11. Or if prostitution is not intended, we have a daring contempt of the commands of God (Lev. xxii. 32). Modesty will have little influence upon those who disregard justice. The name of God will be profaned by those who honour not the nature of man. Father and son forget their filial duties and disgrace themselves by the same crime. "I am the Lord, and ye shall not defile my holy name! For I will be sanctified among the children of Israel." 4. *They desecrated the sanctuary.* (1) *By unlawfully keeping the pledges of the poor.* "They lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge." If a poor man pawned his upper dress which was his only bed, it was to be returned to him before night (Ex. xxii. 25); and a garment so pledged was not to be slept on (Deut. xxiv. 12, 13). But creditors kept the gar-

ments, treated them as their own property, and stretched themselves in luxuriant ease "by every altar." In shameless publicity and hard-heartedness they lay on the garments of the poor and despoiled. They avowed their sins and insulted the true God by the altars of false gods. (2) *By drunken feasts in idolatrous temples.* "They drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their God." They fined the poor, and were paid in liquor or expended the money in wine. What they got by injustice they spent in sensuality. They added revelry to oppression, and the wine which they poured out in libations or drank at idolatrous feasts was the price of innocent blood. Idols may not refuse such abominable sacrifices, but God will not accept them. "For I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt-offering."

> Not such the service the benignant Father
> Requireth at his earthly children's hands:
> Not the poor offering of vain rites, but rather
> The simple duty man from man demands [*Whittier*].

II. The aggravation of Israel's guilt. God's benefits should strengthen our gratitude. He requires much from those to whom much is given. Israel's guilt is measured by Israel's privileges. They despised the blessings and neglected the warnings they received from God (ver. 9—11). 1. *Israel was indebted to God for its national existence.* He created them for his own peculiar people, preserved them from danger, and kept them in continued existence. (1) *He redeemed them from bondage.* "I brought you up from the land of Egypt." Mercies to our ancestors are blessings to us, for we could not exist without them. Past deliverances should never be forgotten. They should keep alive our gratitude and bind us to duty. God dates our benefits that we may remember them. If we despise his kindness, we aggravate our guilt. England has a wonderful past, and the present generation should not forget God's benefits. "He hath not dealt so with any nation." (2) *He defended them in danger.* "Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them," &c. The Amorites were the most powerful of the Canaanites and most terrible to Israel. Joshua, rehearsing God's kindness, places the destruction of the Amorites as one of the most prominent deeds to Israel. "I brought you into the land of the Amorites which dwelt on the other side of Jordan, and I destroyed them before you." The greater the danger, the greater should be our gratitude for deliverance. The more God displays his love and power towards us, the more should we keep his law and praise his name. (3) *He guided them in their journeys.* "Led you forty years through the wilderness." This reminded them of innumerable blessings in the course of their existence. Manna from heaven and water from the rock; deliverance from serpents and manifold perils; provoking sins and unqualified mercy; human guides and Divine presence. God led them and gave them possession of the land, for they did not get it by their own numbers and skill. Thus were they raised up and defended; planted in their inheritance and preserved in their existence. What echoes of the past resounded in their laws! The mercies of to-day remind us of the miracles of yesterday. Past and present, memory and law, remind us of our duty. "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness." 2. *Israel was indebted to God for inspired teachers.* "And I raised up of your sons for prophets." From the beginning to the end of their existence they were not left without light and instruction. Men of sanctity and power, like Elijah and Elisha, were sent unto them, filled with wisdom and the Holy Spirit. Messenger after messenger rebuked their sins and revealed the will of God. They were never left without a witness of God's presence and a prophet to teach them. "Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt, unto this day, I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them." 3. *Israel was indebted to God for noble examples.* "And of your young men for Nazarites." Prophets instruct, examples show that these instructions may be put into practice.

They are visible illustrations both of the possibility of doing what is enjoined and of the method in which it is done. Hence the proverbs, "Example is more powerful than precept;" "Precepts lead, examples draw;" "Every art is best taught by example." The Nazarites were noble specimens of temperance and self-control, examples of men who vow and are able by God's grace to keep the vow. We are more apt to learn through the eye than the ear, and what is seen in fact makes a deeper impression upon the mind. Israel were blessed with men, living among them day by day, to quicken attention and incite to the obedience of that law which they despised. Men who counteracted the evil and gave an impulse to the virtuous tendencies of the age. Young men who are examples of self-denial and devotedness to God are an honour to any country. They are monuments of God's grace, living reproofs of the impiety of the day, and deserve to be imitated in their spirit and conduct. "I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done." 4. *Israel did not acknowledge her indebtedness to God for these privileges.* They sought not to walk in the light, but to extinguish it. They perverted God's gifts into occasions for greater sin. (*a*) *They tempted the Nazarite to break his vow.* "But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink." It is a horrid sin when men will neither be holy themselves, nor let others keep the law of God. It is the height of ingratitude to abuse the temperate and seek to destroy their character. Yet such crimes are committed in England to-day. Sons of temperance are tempted to break their pledge (Num. vi. 2, 3); self-denial is considered weakness, and pious men are exposed to ridicule and contempt. Young men are often surprised and allured, reproached and frightened, into sin. "And so," says a quaint author, "many do the tempter's work." (*b*) *They sought to silence the prophet in his teaching.* "Commanded the prophets, saying, Prophesy not." The guilty conscience hates reproof. The godly teacher irritates the sinner, and God's servants are often threatened if they hold not their tongue. Jezebel swore by her gods to destroy Elijah (1 Kings xix. 2, 3). Amaziah silenced the prophet: "Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear. Why shouldest thou be smitten?' Jeremiah had to face hatred, mockery, and imprisonment. The chief priests sought to silence the apostles, first by command, then by scourges, and lastly by persecution. If God's ministers will not preach evil tidings, they will be unmolested; but when they proclaim the judgments of God on the sins of men, then nations rise up in authority and opposition. "Wherefore dost thou prophesy?" (Jer. xxxii. 3). Those who deaden the voice of God within, and silence the word of God without them, leave no means of access to the soul or the people. Dreadful is the doom of those who harden themselves against the gospel, and refuse its last offers of mercy from its faithful ministers Such were Israel's guilt and Israel's punishment. "They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." **III. The severe punishment for Israel's guilt** (ver. 13—16). Base contempt for covenant mercies God will visit with severe punishment. The long-suffering of God will at length be wearied out by obstinaate sinners and ungrateful nations. 1. *Punishment most crushing.* Taking the words as alluding "to the force of war, under which even the bravest and most able heroes will succumb." God threatens to oppress them most heavily. As the cart full of sheaves presses the ground; so God would press them down, by war and the effects of war. This is a fit retribution for their own oppression, robbery, and injustice to the poor. Judgments in number and variety would fill the land, and distress would overcome its inhabitants. Bradford the martyr said, "He that will not tremble in threatening shall be crushed in pieces in feeling." Men through their own sins often have to say, "We were pressed out of measure above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life." 2. *Punishment most inevitable.* The judgments are fixed and inevitable, and none can escape except by repentance, the door of which is never shut in these Divine threatenings. (1) *The swift cannot flee away.* "The flight shall perish from the swift." Men are afraid

and wish to escape from the judgments of God. But it is too late, and the escape is impossible. "He that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself." A horse will be a vain thing in that day for safety. "Neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself" from his pursuers. (2) *The strong cannot defend themselves.* "The strong shall not strengthen his force" against the power of God. Military hosts are not a match for an angry God. "The mighty," who may have protected others, shall not "deliver himself" then. "There is no king saved by the multitude of a host; a mighty man is not delivered by much strength" (Ps. xxxiii. 16). Weapons of war will be of no avail. "Neither shall he stand that handleth the bow." 3. *The courageous cannot withstand the attack.* "He that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away." The most spirited and brave, the most firm-souled and mighty, cannot deliver themselves. What a picture. Fear will disable the skilled archer. The strong will be bereft of his might. Panic will seize all ranks, and those who flee cannot escape. "A kingdom for a horse," cried one in battle, but in the day of judgment every means of strength, resistance, and escape will fail. Those who make not God their refuge, shall find none for themselves in the day of visitation. "Many among them shall stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken" (Is. viii. 15; Amos ix. 2).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 7. God had laid down the equality of man, made in his own image, and had forbidden to favour either poor (Ex. xxiii. 3) or rich (Ib. 6). Amos calls these by different names, which entitled them to human sympathy; poor, depressed, lowly; *poor*, in their absolute condition; *depressed*, as having been brought low; *lowly*, as having the special grace of their state, the wonderful meekness and lowliness of the godly poor [*Pusey*].

Ver. 9. God removes difficulties out of the way. The pilgrim often magnifies them into sons of Anak. "*I* destroyed" (emphatic). God uproots all fears, extirpates all enemies, and leaves neither "fruit from above" nor "roots from beneath." Not merely cut down, but plucked up, and no chance of springing into existence again. A complete and irrecoverable destruction. This—1. Displays power. 2. Should excite confidence; and 3. Stimulate progress.

Ver. 10. God's fidelity towards Israel contrasted with Israel's conduct towards God (Deut. ii. 7; viii. 2. Cf. Mic. vi. 4).

HOMILETICS.

CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE.—*Verse* 10.

Life is a pilgrimage; but all [illegible] do not consider themselves "strangers" on earth. Had God intended this world to be the home of his people, he would have made better accommodation. But they seek a country, even a heavenly one.

I. The destination. "To possess the land of the Amorite." Canaan was promised to the Jews, and though in the possession of the enemies, yet God drove out the heathen and planted them (Ps. xliv. 2). A people numerous, warlike, and strongly fortified, were overturned by a feeble nation. The oaks of Bashan were torn up to plant his chosen vine. God now gives his people inheritance of faith and knowledge, puts them in possession of wealth and vantage-ground on earth, and will give them rest in heaven. II. The starting-point. "I brought you up from the land of Egypt." The local and political elevation of Israel set forth the deliverance and dignity of the Christian. All are found in the house of bondage, under the dominion and lash of sin. Egypt is the starting-place of Israel; the City of Destruction, for the Pilgrim. All are found in a state of degradation and alienation from God. From a lower God's people are called to a higher con

dition, translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. **III. The way.** "Through the wilderness." After leaving Egypt, Israel were literally in the wilderness. A dreary solitary place, full of privations and perils. The world comparatively is a wilderness. It is not the rest, the home of God's people. It is polluted by sin, and unsuited to their moral nature. We must not form attachments and secure possessions which bind us here. "Here we have no continuing city." We must avoid the company and renounce the maxims of the world. Our happiness is not here; it is more elevated and on high.

> All, all on earth is shadow; all beyond
> Is substance: the reverse is Folly's creed;
> How solid all, where change shall be no more!

IV. The leader. "I brought you up." Their safety and joy sprung from God's care. The pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day, went before them and never left them. Moses and Aaron could not guide them. Hence the request, "If thy presence go not with us," &c. God conducts his children now by his Spirit, providence, and word. He will never leave nor forsake them till they have entered the land of promise. He "led them up through the wilderness, for his mercy endureth for ever." **V. The time.** "Forty years through the wilderness." A considerable period, but appointed by God. What scenes and memories would it recall! What proofs of God's power, goodness, and truth! What displays of ingratitude, impatience, and rebellion! Thus God reminds us of important crises in our life, that we may thank him for his goodness, note the progression of time, and prepare for our journey's end. "These forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing."

> Our life is a dream; our time as a shadow
> Glides swiftly away;
> And the fugitive moment refuses to stay.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 11. 1. The gift of prophecy and the institution of the Nazarites are considered special blessings to the nation. 2. This effort to purify society from a special evil is said to be of Divine origin. "*I* raised up your young men." 3. This method of sobering the people must be as wise and necessary now as then. "We learn from these verses the importance attached by God to the Nazarite class, and also that their pre-eminent characteristic was abstinence from wine. Jehovah claims to have raised up a succession of prophets and Nazarites, and the attempt to subvert the fidelity of the Nazarites is coupled as a sin with the impious effort to silence the teachers of the nation, and the organs of the Almighty" [*Temp. Com.*].

Ver. 13. God pressed down with man's iniquity is the sense in which many take these words. I. The pressure of ingratitude. God daily loadeth us with benefits, but we heap up sins upon him. II. The pressure of insults. Insult to his Being, Word, and providence. In whatever light we look upon evil, it is a burden to God and his works. God faints not in the upholding and government of the world. But he grows *weary* with our iniquities (Isa. xliii. 24); and creation groans beneath its weight (Rom. viii. 22). In another sense he carries our sins and will take them from us. Then if delivered from sin, we shall not be crushed by judgments.

The judgments of God. With what patience God bears with man's sin! Three transgressions are followed by a fourth; sin is multiplied by sin, before he inflicts punishments; but impenitent sinners may be sure, that if Divine patience lingers, not willing that any should perish, yet their judgment "lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—3. *Bones burned.* "The wickedness appears to have consisted in a wanton violation of the sanctity of the tomb, by the disinterment and burning of the royal remains. It was indicative of an enmity which was not satisfied with inflicting every possible injury upon its victim while living, but pursued him even into the regions of the dead." To exhume, burn, and disperse the bones of the dead, has often been adopted as a way of showing indignity. The bones of Wycliffe were disinterred and burnt, and Cromwell's remains were most indignantly treated.

Ver. 4, 5. *Evil examples.* As companions are the objects of choice, admiration, and affection, the repulsiveness of vice is lost sight of amidst so much that is attractive. In short, though the vices of a companion be gross and palpable to others, yet, as Shakspeare says, "a friendly eye cannot see such faults" [*Brewer*].

Evil examples are like pestilential diseases—

> The virtuous son is ill at ease
> When the lewd father gave the dire disease.
> [*Pope.*]

Ver. 6—8. *Oppression.* To rob and oppress the rich is a great sin; but to rob and oppress the poor is a greater: but to rob and oppress the poor, because he is poor and wants money to buy justice, is the top of all inhumanity and impiety. To oppress any one is a sin; but to oppress the oppressed is the height of sin. Poverty and want should be motives to pity; but oppressors make them whetstones of their cruelty and severity, and therefore the Lord will plead the cause of his poor oppressed against their oppressors without fee or fear [*Brooks*].

Ver. 9, 10. *Wilderness.* An Emperor of Persia, who designed to go on a journey into Media, durst not proceed on account of the vast quantity of scorpions that were lying round about the road. He sent a great number of stout fellows to destroy these terrible creatures, promising a superior reward to him who killed most Till this execution was over he durst not venture his dignified person abroad [*Whitecross*].

Ver. 12. A man once called upon a publican to settle an account, in a village near Elgin, and was asked to take a dram. The man was a member of a Temperance Society and declined. The publican first began to ridicule and then to tempt him, saying that he would give him a *real good one*, and that besides, a *gin dram* would not be objected to. The simple man at length yielded, and having yielded was more ready to sink before other less powerful temptations. He did so, and is no longer a temperate man nor a member of a society. The conduct of the publican was most atrocious in tempting a man, when he knew his conscientious reasons for total abstinence. If his unhappy victim die the death of the drunkard, who will say he is guiltless of the loss of that man's soul? [*Whitecross*].

Ver. 14—16. *Swift.* The mighty hosts of Persia were no defence at the battle of Arbela. Napoleon led more than half a million of men into Russia, but could not escape the danger by retreat. His valiant guards could neither uphold his empire nor protect his person at Waterloo, when he cried out—"It is all over; save yourselves who can."

> "Not the chief his serried lances,
> Not his strength secures the brave;
> All in vain the war-horse prances,
> Weak his force his lord to save."
> [*Richard Mant.*]

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Hear**] Cf. beginning of chaps. v. & vi., indicating this chap. to be one whole address. **Whole**] Though the ten tribes threatened, yet all Israel are concerned and warned. **2. Known**] Not only love and care, but gracious fellowship and treatment (Ex. xix. 5; Deut. iv. 20); "including both the motive and result of election." **3. Two**] The prophet and the Spirit of God. Israel did not believe that *God* threatened such denunciations by the prophets (ch. vi. 1—3; i. 7, 8). Amos spoke because God commanded him. **4. Lion**] roars when the prey is before it, before it actually seizes it, and there is no possibility of escape. "After the roar there immediately follows both slaughter and laceration. For as a rule it only roars with that sharp roar when it has the prey in sight, upon which it immediately springs." **A young lion**] which goes in pursuit of prey, and is distinguished from the one that lies silent until the old one brings prey near; then the scent rouses him. **5. Bird**] God not only has the nation ripe for judgment in his power, but the judgment is deserved. As birds are not taken without the net of the fowler, and he does not take it up until he has secured his prey, so God not only threatens, but is prepared to execute. **6. Trumpet**] blown in the city alarms every one; the coming evil should arouse from self-security (Ezek. xxxiii. 1—5). **7. Lord**] This explains all the similes. God is the author of these calamities. **Prophets**] being servants of God, must obey him in setting forth judgments upon Israel (Jer. xx. 9; Ezek. ix. 11). **8.**] As when the lion roars all men fear, so when God speaks I must prophesy (Acts iv. 20; v. 29). **9. Publish**] upon (the floor of) the palaces, some; others, *over* them, to call the princes and inhabitants to hear and see the acts of violence, and testify against Israel. "**Ashdod**, one of the Philistian capitals, is mentioned by way of example, as a chief city of the uncircumcised, who were regarded by Israel as godless heathen; and **Egypt** is mentioned along with it as the nation whose unrighteousness and ungodliness had once been experienced by Israel to satiety. If therefore such heathen as these are called to behold the unrighteous and dissolute conduct to be seen in the palaces, it must have been great indeed" [*Keil*]. **Tumults**] Heb. denotes a state of confusion and noise in which order and justice are overthrown by open violence. **10. Regard not**] Not merely ignorant, but cherish a state of mind hostile to knowledge. Moral corruption blinded the power of discernment, so that the magnates of Samaria had no regard for right. **11.**] Whatever was boasted of would be removed. **12.**] By an appropriate and pastoral image the prophet declares that if a scanty remnant escape it will only be by miracle, like fragments of sheep left by the lion. Grandees who sit on costly divans and rest in ease will escape with great difficulty (ch. vi. 1—4). **13. Hear**] Addressed to heathen who have now to witness the punishment upon Israel. **14. Altars**] Vengeance upon the centre from which spread the evils (1 Kings xii. 32). **Horns**] destroyed in utter contempt and desolation (Ex. xxvii. 2). **15. Houses**] Eastern monarchs have summer and winter residences: the former upon mountains or in forests, the latter in cities and sheltered situations (Judg. iii. 20; Jer. xxxvi. 22). **Ivory**] Houses and palaces richly ornamented with this material will be entirely ruined. Samaria is threatened with the overthrow of its palaces, and the extermination of its people. Nothing will avail if righteousness be wanting in the day of the Lord (Prov. x. 2).

HOMILETICS.

GOD'S CHASTISEMENT OF A COVENANT PEOPLE.—*Verses* 1, 2.

Before the end of chastisement can be answered its nature must be discerned. In itself it may seem of no moment, but when viewed as the expression of God's purpose it is significant. Israel therefore should hear, for God Himself speaks and will punish. Thrice does Amos address the same solemn call to a nation whose former favours do not exempt from impending ruin—"Hear this word."

I. **The grounds for chastisement.** God always deals wisely, and often gives reasons for certain proceedings against us. The grounds of Israel's punishment are specified. 1. *Peculiar relationship abused.* (1) *Individually* abused—"children of Israel." Each member of the tribes, every person in the nation, was owned and cared for by God. (2) *Socially abused*—"the whole family." God separated them from others, and united them into one family. This was a natural protest against selfishness, a merciful design to secure obedience to the Supreme Lawgiver, and a method of Divine mercy to mankind. "At that time will I be the God of all the *families* of Israel." But Israel cherished not the disposition of children and dis-

owned their relation to God. "If I be your father where is mine honour?" 2. *Distinguished privileges neglected.* "Which I brought up from the land of Egypt." They were redeemed from bondage and brought up, led to Canaan. This redemption was like a second creation, and a special ground for gratitude. But God's goodness to the nation was forgotten, and his gifts despised. Remarkable deliverances are remembered by God, and should be improved by us. 3. *Special obligations denied.* God blessed and loved them like no other people. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." Others were aliens; they were children. They were distinguished by rank and favour, "made a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." But they dishonoured their character, and violated their obligations to God. Iniquity in some is disobedience to express commands, revolt against Divine authority, and the addition of ingratitude to sin. "Forget not all his benefits." **II. The design of chastisement.** The nearer to God the greater the fall from him. Professors can either praise or profane the name of God. Their sins are more provoking than those of other men. They are against greater light, a higher principle of life, and more exalted relationship. God will not wink at sin in his most favoured children. "Therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities." 1. *Punishment to purify moral character.* God will have all his children to be like him. Bastards may escape, but sons must be chastised. Luther cried, "Strike on, Lord, strike on, for now I know that I am thy child." "As a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee." 2. *Punishment to fit for greater service.* Afflictions remind us of forgotten duty, give discipline for future life, and fit us for a world of sin and sorrow. They make us more fervent and holy, stronger with God and more pitiful to men.

> "More skilful in self-knowledge, ever more pure
> As tempted more; more able to endure
> As more exposed to suffering and distress;
> Thence also more alive to tenderness" [*Wordsworth*].

3. *Punishment to warn others of danger.* "Against the whole family" was the judgment denounced. They were the elect and beloved of God, but their sins only deepened their guilt and made them a warning to others. The lessons imparted to one people are for the benefit of another. There is unity and aim in the moral life of all nations. Exalted privileges everywhere bring heavier responsibility, and shameful abuse severer punishment. Hear this word of the Lord. For "the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?"

Divine Intentions and Executions.—*Verses* 3—8.

In a few similes drawn from daily life, the prophet answers objections which break the force of his threatenings and establishes his right to prophesy. The words might be taken to describe the nature of the punishment mentioned in vers. 1 & 2. 1. It is from God and not any secondary source. 2. It is deserved. 3. It is prepared. 4. It will certainly be executed. 5. There is no possibility of escape. "As the net does not spring up without catching the bird, that has sent it up by flying upon it, can ye imagine that when the destruction passes by, ye will not be seized by it, but will escape without injury" [*Hitzig*]? We shall take the words as a solemn warning to rouse careless sinners, and show that word and deed are one with God. He will execute what he threatens.

I. Threatening is identified with execution. Threats are not simply to frighten men. Punishment will not come, unless it has been prepared. 1. *Punishment is intended.* You have no need to presume on God's favours and God's presence with you. You do not agree and walk with God. You forget his law, and dishonour his name. There is a reason for the severity. If you walk contrary to God, he will not walk with you. If we grieve the Holy Spirit and

offend God, they will depart from us. 2. *Punishment will be executed.* God will not warn of calamity unless there be fit objects of his indignation. His threats are not empty sounds. He has said and will do, spoken and will perform. The lion only roars when he is about to spring on his prey, and God only threatens when he is about to punish. He can neither lie nor change; he is faithful and true. **II. Execution must be traced to God himself.** The word and the providence of God declare this. 1. *God's servant declares the truth.* God has revealed his secrets to the prophet, and he utters the purpose of God and not his own. What right had he to speak? some would say, and the reply is: he was the servant of God, specially called and qualified. He shunned not "to declare the whole counsel of God." His strength consisted in knowing that he was doing his Master's will, and speaking his Master's word. "The Lord hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" 2. *God's providence entrapped the nation.* Calamities which befall nations and kingdoms do not happen by chance. God's hand must be seen in them. If a bird is caught in the snare, the snare was designed for it. So when a people are involved in judgments, God has prepared the peril and misery for them. And as no fowler takes up the net without securing the prey, neither will God withdraw his judgments until he has accomplished his purpose. Men may resist the truth, but it is seen every day. Misfortunes as punishments are not casual, but come from God. They have a real author, a definite cause, and a special aim. God sends them in righteous retribution, determines beforehand who shall suffer, and who escape. "He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know" (Ps. xciv. 7, 9; Mic. vi. 9)? **III. Warning is given before the execution of threatening.** In the last image the prophet seeks to rouse them to a sense of danger before it be too late. Repentance may break the snare, and men may be delivered in mercy. 1. *The alarm is given.* "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid?" They heed the sound which warns of approaching danger, tremble in fear, and seek to escape. Or when the punishment has actually come, they ascribe it to the right source, and humble themselves before God. "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?" 2. *The danger is made known.* "The lion hath roared, who will not fear?" &c. God speaks through his servants, who reveal his hatred to sin, and his justice in punishing it. He has always warned of the danger before it actually comes. "Thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me." The living ministry and the written scripture are a perpetual warning to men of a judgment to come. Be not found unprepared. We may repent now, but if we obstinately continue in sin God will be just in the punishment of it. "I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words nor to my law, but rejected it."

Walking in Agreement with God.—*Verse* 3.

Taking these words generally we learn—

I. Agreement with God is necessary to walking with God. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" God and the sinner are not in agreement. They are at variance in heart and life. There is nothing common between them. They are opposite, as two travellers walking in different directions. Those who justify self and disobey God, must recognize their guilt, and avail themselves of the blood of Jesus. They must agree with God—1. *In disposition.* 2. *In character.* 3. *In conduct.* There is a basis for friendship in Christ, and men may live at peace with God. "Be ye reconciled to God." **II. Agreement with God will show itself in walking with God.** Friendship naturally develops itself in unity of mind and pursuit, in acts of gratitude and love. David and Jonathan were real friends, and walked together. Abraham was the friend of God because he obeyed God and had perfect confidence in him. If we are agreed with God, we shall seek to please and obey him. Our life will be like that of Enoch, a con-

stant, habitual, daily walk with God. Walking together is a common act of human fellowship, indicating "evenness and similarity of gait," interchange of thought and opinion, and anxious desire to "keep step." Walking implies action and progress. Our life should be devoted to God, and our deeds performed through and for God. If we are God's people, his will will be the rule and his glory the end of our life in all things. "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever things I command you." III. Disagreement with God will interrupt walking with God. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" When companions disagree they never walk together. *Sin* is disagreement with God, separates from him, and puts us in opposition to his will and word. It is a breach of the agreement, and a step in a crooked direction; "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" *Outward profession*, without love and conformity to God, will prevent us walking with God. Insincerity of any kind will grieve the Holy Spirit and offend God. God will never walk with us unless we walk with him. God is ready to walk with us, "But if ye walk contrary unto me" (margin, "at adventures with me," or another reading, "at hap-hazard with me," in jerking, spasmodic fashion), "then will I also walk contrary unto you" (Lev. xxvi.).

> "My business now is with my God to walk,
> And guided by his holy eye to go;
> Sweet fellowship with him to cultivate,
> And his unclouded countenance to know" [*J. F. Kwist*].

PREPARATION FOR REVIVAL.—*Verse* 3.

The believer is agreed with God concerning the *Divine law;* that it is "holy, and just, and good"—that a breach of the law should be visited with penalty; agreed with God in the *atonement for sin* which God has provided in Christ; and at one with God in his *love of holiness.* This agreement gives us power to walk with God. As a Church our hearts are set upon a revival of religion in our midst. We need as the first and most essential thing *that God should walk with us.* If we desire his presence we must perfectly agree with him both in the *design* of the work and the *method* of it.

I. Let us avow our desire that in our present efforts we may walk with God, otherwise our strivings after revival will be *wearisome,* and always *end in disappointment.* If we are not favoured by God's presence in our attempts at revival, *prayer will be greatly dishonoured* and the *Church left in* a worse condition than it was before. Consider the blessings which flow from God's presence upon the ministry, the Church, and the congregation, and let this confirm your desire. II. If we would have the presence of God, it is necessary that we should be agreed with him. We must be agreed with him as to the *end of our Christian existence;* as to real desirableness and necessity of the *conversion of souls;* as to the *means to be used* in revival, and as to *our utter helplessness in this work.* If any good should be done all the glory must be given to him. III. Let us put away all those things which offend our God. Before God appeared at Sinai Israel had to cleanse themselves for three days. So here. Is there *pride* in me? Am I *slothful?* Am I guilty of *worldliness?* Am I *covetous?* Am I of an *angry* spirit? Is there any *lust* in me? If so God will not walk with me. If the Master's spirit is in you, and you long to see brighter and better days, lift up your heads with confidence in him who will walk with us if we be agreed with him [*Spurgeon*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 3–7. In these verses are *Five Parables* all showing God's moral government in the affairs of the world and of his Church: and that nothing in the

history of either happens by chance, but is ordered by him, using the natural elements and the greatest nations of the world as instruments for the punishment of sins committed after deliberate warning, and for the manifestation of his power and glory [*Wordsworth*].

Ver. 3. *Walking with God.* 1. As individuals we must be reconciled with him. 2. As churches, co-operate with him. 3. As a nation, promote his glory.

Ver. 6. *The voice of God in the city.* No chance, fate, nor second cause has sent the evil. It must all be traced to God. His voice must be heard—1. *In the consciences of its people.* They have a presentiment of danger at the sound of the trumpet, hasten together and devise means of escape. However stupid and blind in sin, God has a witness within men, that sin brings sorrow, and is the cause of their misery. Hence the appeal, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" 2. *In judgments upon its sins.* Drunkenness, debauchery, neglect of God's house, and contempt of his word. "Evil is of two sorts, evil of sin and evil of punishment. There is no other; for evil of nature, or evil of fortune, are evils, by God's providence, punishing the evil of sin. Evil which is sin the Lord hath not done; evil which is punishment for sin the Lord bringeth. The providence of God governing and controlling all things, man doth ill which he wills, so as to suffer ills which he wills not" [*Pusey*].

Ver. 7. In this verse a high honour is vindicated to the prophetical office. The holy men of God were, by inspiration, entrusted with a knowledge of the Divine purposes, in so far as it was necessary for them to divulge them to the world [*A. Elzas*].

God's secrets with his servants. 1. In the spiritual insight into his word. Our darkness does not comprehend the light. God imparts understanding, the threatenings become more solemn, and the promises more precious. 2. In the revelation of his will to man. God has spoken to men through patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. He speaks to us by the ministry now, and does nothing without disclosing it to his servants. This has ever been the law of the Divine procedure. Nothing is coming upon men which has not been revealed. "The grand outlines of the plan of Divine providence, and the events of history, to this day and to the end of the world, were made known to the prophets of Israel and Judah, and a very large proportion of them, many ages before they took place; so that a general history of mankind, as to the most important facts, might be composed from their writings" [*Scott in loco*].

Ver. 8. *Who can but.* The intensity of feeling expressed in these words indicates—1. *An inward struggle.* Shall I keep back or proclaim the unwelcome truth? Shall I alienate some, harden others, and render myself unpopular (Jer. xx. 9; Ezek. xxxiii. 7)? Here under depressing influence. To such inquiries the answer is, "The Lord God hath spoken." 2. *The declaration of a necessity.* Every true servant must utter the word given to him. Moses, though slow of tongue; Isaiah, of polluted lips; and Jeremiah, though a child, were not excused. The apostles were influenced by this spirit (Acts iv. 20); and Paul exclaimed, "*Necessity* is laid upon me, yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel." 3. *The assertion of a law.* God calls and commands his prophets, their own spirits prompt them: hence they cannot hesitate or refuse; they must speak, whether men will hear or forbear. "Who can but prophesy?"

HOMILETICS.

National Calamities.—*Verses* 9—12.

The sins of Israel are to be punished, and heathen nations are summoned to witness. This turn in the address indicates the exceeding sinfulness of the sins such as to surprise the heathen and put Israel to shame.

I. National guilt. Sin brings shame. From the heights around the injustice of Israel is beheld. 1. *Moral sensibility impaired.* "They know not to do right." God has planted a sense of right in the breast of every one. This should be cultivated and strengthened. Indulgence in sin blunts this moral sensibility, and men at length become unable to do and perceive good. The love of evil blinds the power of discernment, and brings moral corruption (Jer. iv. 22). "I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil." 2. *Public justice perverted.* Courts of law were the scenes of injustice, and the rights of the people were neither known nor cared for. The poor were oppressed. God and his law were set at nought, violence and robbery prevailed, and evil customs reigned supreme. 3. *Shameless fraud committed.* "Who store up violence and robbery in their palaces." One sin leads to another. Riches gained by fraud will never be used as means of benevolence and justice. All oppression is cruel; but to defraud the poor to increase unrighteous wealth is aggravation most insulting to God (Ps. xi. 5; xii. 5). Men may store up their treasures, and fill their palaces, to crush the poor and cheapen their luxuries. But "sin pays its servants very bad wages," says a quaint author; "for it gives the very reverse of what it promised. While the sin of oppression promises mountains of gold, it brings them poverty and ruin. Injuries done to the poor are sorely resented by the God of mercy, who is the poor man's friend, and will break in pieces his oppressor." "The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them, because they refuse to do judgment." **II. National disorder.** "Behold the great tumults in the midst thereof." Injustice and cruelty in the upper will ever bring alarm and confusion in the lower classes. A people intent on gain, turning law upside down, will create great tumults. National honour has been stained, and a reign of terror introduced by national disorders. Tumults have darkened the pages in the history of Greece, lost some of the noblest sons of Rome, and been terrible punishments to France. Let England remember that licentiousness and cruelty, fraud and oppression, will create confusion in the people; that wealth unlawfully gained, and unjustly stored; that mammon and pleasure habitually worshipped, will only "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." **III. National disgrace.** It is a shame to any person to have his guilt and punishment revealed to others. "Every nation," says Ryan, "is ashamed when its disgrace is proclaimed to other nations, and especially if those nations are remarkable for their hostility to it. Of all nations that have ever existed, the Israelites were most vulnerable in this respect. The position which they were taught to maintain, the exclusiveness of that system which was given to them of God, made them conspicuous objects of attention to other people, and exposed them most completely to the language of reproach and scorn in the day of their humiliation." But God puts men to shame now, to keep them from everlasting shame and contempt. **IV. National invasion.** Civil discord would be followed by the ravages of an invading enemy. "An adversary" would hem them in on all sides, encircle the land and assault their habitations. 1. *Power which they abused shall be taken away.* "He shall bring down thy strength from thee." They would be bereft of all strength and resources on which they depended (Prov. x. 15). When God is angry strength will prove weakness, and wealth end in poverty. 2. *Palaces which they stored shall be destroyed.* "Thy palaces shall be destroyed." Palaces are no defence to fraud and oppression. 3. *There would be a general and complete overthrow* of the kingdom, with only a remnant of escape. The rulers had been guilty of oppression and robbery; disregarded these evils in others, notwithstanding the tumults and disorders they created; and filled their palaces with the fruits of robbery. But as an appropriate punishment their violence should be broken, and their wealth stolen from them. "The spoilers must themselves be spoiled."

"To wrong-doers the revolution of time brings retribution" [*Shakespeare*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 9, 10. *God's assessors in judgment.* The character assigned to the inhabitants of Philistia and Egypt is virtually that of assessors, who not only take cognizance of, but concur in the judgment executed (cf. ver. 13, lit. "Hear ye and testify *against* the house of Jacob"). From this we learn that in the execution of his righteous judgments God desires to obtain a verdict in the impartial human conscience. What is here figuratively represented by the neighbouring nations taking their stand on the mountains of Samaria takes place inwardly and silently in the minds of men. It is analogous to what in modern times is termed the verdict of public opinion. No institution is in danger until a sentence has been recorded against it in the tribunal of conscience and right reason. And the like may be said of the general stability and independence of nations. In such a case as the present two important ends are served. 1. The witnesses or jurors give a human attestation to the righteousness of the Divine procedure, and thus justify the ways of God. That they are themselves guilty and sinful makes their verdict all the more emphatic. 2. They thus obtain a truer and deeper acquaintance with God and his ways, and what they have seen in others becomes a warning to themselves [*The Preacher's Lantern*, vol. iv.].

"Heaven gives the needful but neglected call.
What day, what hour, but knocks at human hearts,
To wake the soul to a sense of future scenes?"
[*Young.*]

Vers. 10, 11. *Righteous requital.* 1. Requital from God. "Thus saith the Lord God." "There was no human redress. The oppressor was mighty, but mightier the avenger of the poor. Man would not help, therefore God would. An adversary there shall be even round about the land; lit. an enemy, and around the land" [*Pusey*]. 2. Requital by means of their own sons. "Man's sins are in God's providence the means of his punishment. Their spoiling should invite the spoiler, their oppressions should attract the oppressor; and they, with all which they held to be their strength, should go forth into captivity" [*Pusey*].

"The cries of orphans and the oppressor's rage
Doth reach the stars" [*Dryden*].

3. Requital justified by human testimony. "Publish in the palaces of Ashdod." The transgressions of which Israel were guilty were to be manifest to others, and attested by the human conscience. "The Lord will be justified in his sayings and in his works, when he executeth judgment on us, and shall be cleared, even by the most unjust judges, when he is judged."

Ver. 12. *The miserable remnant.* 1. A remnant robbed of glory. Bereft of the national glory which once belonged to them, yet just enough to show that they had once been a part of it. 2. A remnant saved. After God's righteous vengeance had accomplished its end, a remnant only shall be saved (Joel ii. 32). "Taken out for the good of others, not their own." 3. A remnant injured by violence, rescued from danger, like a sheep almost devoured by the lion; taken at the last extremity, a monument of God's mercy, and a proof of exposure to violence and risk.

As shepherds, ministers of God have to defend the flock against wild beasts and robbers. Carelessness should not permit one to be lost or injured. The Good Shepherd seeks to rescue all. Let none sit in ease and carnal security, lest they be destroyed by the lion going about seeking whom he may devour.

HOMILETICS.

DIVINE VISITATION.—*Verses* 13, 14.

These verses renew and raise the threatening to a higher degree. God will visit the transgressions of Israel upon him, and utter destruction will be the consequence of moral corruption.

I. The seats of idolatry overturned. A people guilty of false worship are incapable of seeing the evil and the danger of it. Sentence must be uttered against the house of Jacob, for they cannot escape Divine judgments. 1. *The centres of idolatry destroyed.* "The altars of Bethel" were the source of their sins, the fountain-head of their superstitions. A special judgment is pronounced against Bethel the religious, and Samaria the political, seats of corruption. 2. *The objects of idolatry destroyed.* Destruction is threatened against the horns of the altar, and all attractions to idolatry. These were to "be cut off" with violence and "fall to the ground." 3. *The votaries of idolatry destroyed.* The teachers and supporters were to have their punishment according to their prominence. Their support was withheld, and their doctrines proved false. Their religion was not defence, and all their hopes were disappointed. Natural religion can never be a substitute for revealed. Those who trust in the former and reject the latter will sink into ignorance and sin. Every kind of false worship, instead of helping, will become an object of Divine displeasure. "So shall Bethel do unto you because of your great wickedness." **II. The palaces of grandeur pulled down.** "The great houses shall have an end, saith the Lord." The mansions of the rich, with their pomp and splendour, extravagance and folly, shall be spoiled by the enemy. The capital shall be robbed, and all its magnificent palaces destroyed. Pride is not in keeping with prosperity. Prodigality to ingratitude will only increase misery. Habitations decorated with art and inlaid with ivory, which exclude the presence of God, will have an end and dissolve to dust. **III. The retreats of luxury destroyed.** Luxury and pride generally follow idolatry. But we have "the same minute filling up of the picture," says one, "in the threatenings against the luxurious retreats of the rich. 'The winter house,' with its comfortable shelter from the influences of cold; 'the summer house,' with all its spacious provision to secure a cool retreat from oppressive heat; 'the house of ivory,' which might show the refined taste of its possessor; and 'the great house,' which would display his wealth and give room for his revelry—all were marked, like trees in a forest; their end was determined, it would quickly come." The palace of the prince and the cottage of the poor, the spacious mansion and the fortified castle, will one day come to ruin. Let us "build high," and secure "that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 13. Divine visitation. *I. In relation to the prophets of God.* A new charge is given to Amos and the rest of God's servants, to understand the message themselves and proclaim it to others. "It is of little avail to *testify*, unless we first *hear;* nor can man *bear witness* to what he doth not know; nor will words make an *impression*, i. e. leave a trace of themselves—be stamped in or on men's souls—unless the soul which utters them have first hearkened unto them" [*Pusey*]. *II. In relation to others.* "In the house of Jacob" the testimony must be given; but Philistines and Egyptians, as ver. 9, are called upon to witness. Not only God's servants, but others have need to be roused from their slumber and quicken attention to the word and authority of God. In the space of six verses the prophet earnestly repeats the words, "saith the Lord." Men of our time should not question nor limit the message of the gospel. Be imbued with the spirit of Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." *III. In relation to their design.* The punishment of sin and the correction of God's people. Sin is the procuring cause of all punishment. God may endure long, but will at length vindicate his holiness and visit "the transgressions" upon those who commit them.

Vers. 14, 15. We are strongly reminded here of what in recent years

befell Paris and Rome, which have occupied analogous positions in the Papal world, to those which were then held in Israel by Samaria and Bethel [*Preacher's Lantern*, vol. iv.].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Vers. 1, 2. *Special favours.* Men are not to be envied simply because they are endowed with special favours. Those very endowments, unless they are faithfully used, only augment responsibility, deepen guilt, and ensure a more terrible retribution. Where much has been given much will be required. It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, &c. [*Dr Thomas*].

Ver. 3. When God walks with a nation that nation prospers, but if that nation falls to words with God, quarrels with him about his will and law, and rushes perversely into sinful courses;—nay, if there be some in it who have no God at all, who do their best to extirpate his very name from the earth which he himself has made, then we cannot expect that God should continue to walk with such offenders. Consider whether there has not been enough in England, and especially in this great city, to make God angry with us? Has there not been grievous disagreement between the dwellers in this city and God [*Spurgeon*]?

Vers. 3—6. The first question was taken from travellers, the second from wild beasts, the third from fowlers; the fourth question implies that inasmuch as God had a purpose in sending tribulation, he will not remove it until that design is answered; and the fifth, that an awakening should be the result [*Ibid.*].

Ver. 9. *Samaria.* The metropolis of the kingdom of Israel was built on a round hill, near the middle of a large valley, surrounded by mountains on every side, by which it was completely overlooked. From these elevations persons might distinctly see what was done in the city [*Elzas*].

Vers. 10, 11. They might seem to be secure and at ease in Samaria and Damascus, but vain would every such remedy against fear and sorrow prove. From the strong city, from the soft couch, they would be dragged to misery and destruction. In about 40 years after the time of this prophecy we read (2 Kings xvii. 3) of a siege of Samaria which lasted three years, at the end of which the city was taken; and after the horrors of war, the spoiling of their palaces and their wealth, the remnant was dragged into a distant land, to endure the miseries of captivity and exile [*Ryan*].

Vers. 14, 15. *Visit.* The sins of a nation draw judgment after them as the moon draws after it the billows that beat upon the shore. Let no nation hope to escape judgment until it gets rid of sin. Judgments are but sins ripened into a harvest, subterranean fires breaking into volcanoes [*Dr Thomas*].

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Kine] Fat and wanton, yet effeminate and luxuriant; reproved not for fierceness, but unfeeling insolence and oppression. Say] (1) Wives here intended, voluptuous women after the analogy of Is. iii. 16; xxxii. 9—13. "The sin of these women consisted in the tyrannical oppression of the poor, whilst they asked their lords, *i. e.* their husbands, to procure them the means of debauchery" [*Keil*]. (2) Others, princely oppressors, who say to their king, with whom they indulge in drink, and whom they ask to seal the bargain with wine. Oppress] Lit. con-

tinually oppress. **Crush**] Heb. expresses vehemence. **2. Holiness**] which binds him to punish (Ps. lxxxix. 35). **Hooks**] Invaders and spoilers compared to fishers (Jer. xvi. 16; Heb. i. 15). **3. Breaches**] of city walls broken by the enemy. **Every**] one before her, *i. e.* without looking to right or left (cf. Josh. vi. 5, 20), as cows through a gap or fence. **Cast**] "The word may describe the headlong motion of the animal, and the desperate gestures of the hopeless" [*Pusey*]. **4. Gilgal**] The scene of idolatry. **Multiply**] Irony. Since you will not be reformed, go on, try whether God likes your sacrifices; eager as you are in worship, you will not prevent punishment. Your tithe and incense only increase guilt. **5. Leaven**] against the law (Lev. ii. 11). **Liketh**] This is what you love. **6. Teeth**] Famine, as threatened in the law (Deut. xxviii. 48, 57; cf. 2 Kings viii. 1). **7. Yet three**] The latter rain, which fell in latter part of February and beginning of March, when most required (1 Kings xvii. 1). **One city**] Distress so great that people from one place had to go a great distance for supply, yet could not get enough to satisfy. **8. Wandered**] Heb. indicates the trembling, unsteady gait of those exhausted in quest of food (Ps. lix. 15; cix. 10; Jer. xiv. 1—6). **9. Blasting**] Lit. an exceeding scorching. **Mildew**] Heb. intensive. The mention of these would remind them of other judgments (Deut. xxviii. 22). **10. Manner**] *i. e.* the way in which God punished Egypt (Ex. ix. 3). "Palestine was by nature healthy. Hence on account of the terribleness of the scourge, God often speaks of it as of his own special sending" [*Pusey*]. **11. Firebrand**] Proverbial for escape from imminent danger. **Yet**] after all corrective measures, obstinately impenitent, and determined to persist in wicked courses! **12. Therefore**] punishments must be continued. **This**] not expressed, but discerned from what follows—all kinds of things imagined in the uncertainty; but the last the greatest calamity. **Prepare**] "When thou seest that thou hast resorted in vain to all kinds of subterfuges, since thou never wilt be able to escape from the hand of thy judge; see now at length that thou dost avert this last destruction which is hanging over thee" [*Calvin*]. **13**] To give greater emphasis to the command, God is described as Almighty, reading the thoughts of men, creating prosperity and adversity as he changes light and darkness, subjecting all things to his control, and ruling as the Lord of Hosts. What an argument for being at peace with him.

HOMILETICS.

Sad Pictures of Human Life.—*Verses* 1—3.

Punishment is the leading thought in chap. iii., but in this sin is the prominent thought, and its consequences incidental to prove its exceeding sinfulness. Civil injustice and oppression were very common. The king and his ministers are spoken of in terms of contempt, for sharp rebuke often becomes an imperative duty.

I. Insolent abuse of prosperity. Bashan was a place of rich soil and pasturage (Mic. vii. 14; Jer. l. 19). Animals fed there were among the strongest and fattest (Deut. xxxii. 14). *Bulls* furnished a type of the mighty, fierce, and unfeeling men of earth; *kine* may indicate the luxury and effeminacy of men or women—a life of wantonness and brutish feeling. Amos points out the princes and judges as ringleaders in provocation and insolence. They grew fat and prosperous, abused their place and power, and made themselves base and contemptible. In their pleasure and grandeur they despised the herdman and the poor. They thought more highly of themselves than they ought to do. Like beasts, they found their enjoyments in self-indulgence and luxury. Men who wallow in riches and surfeit themselves in pleasure fatten themselves for slaughter. Those who live a brutish life will die a brutish death. Men in worldly honour, without true wisdom, are worse than beasts that perish. Their eminence is their peril, and their fall is disgraceful. "Man that is in honour and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish." **II. Might ruling over right.** Men in prosperity and high rank often become extravagant and tyrannical. They lose the tenderness of their own, and have no sympathy with the nature of others. Might overcomes right. 1. *In oppressing the poor.* The poor are always with us to kindle our sympathies, teach our dependence, and fulfil the purpose of God. In true philanthropy there is present blessedness and godlike action. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble." The poor must be defended provided for, and not oppressed. They are not of a lower grade than ourselves If we mock or oppress them we reproach God. "He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker." 2. *In crushing the needy.* Society is a medium for

illustrating the attributes of humanity, and building up the moral history of the world. It is composed of all classes, and bound together by all ties. He who is charitable to the needy exhibits moral likeness to God, and administers to the glory of Christ in heaven (Matt. xxv. 40). But when men gratify pride in selfishness, disregard the rights of the poor, and, like powerful cattle, trample the weak under-foot, it is a mark of an unfeeling heart and social corruption—a way to obliterate the moral character of society, and a prelude to Divine judgment. It is sad when men vent their wantonness where there is no power to resist. Not the wolf with the wolf, but the wolf with the defenceless lamb, "devouring the poor and needy from off the earth." Yet they are found among the rulers of God's own people, among the teachers of religion, and in the common ranks of life. "Judge righteously and plead the cause of the poor and needy." **III. Confederacy in wickedness.** "Bring, and let us drink." The wicked encourage and strengthen one another in sin. "Come on," said Pharaoh, "let us deal wisely with them." The king and his courtiers in Israel practised oppression themselves, abetted it and connived at it in others. A sinful course cannot long prosper. Articles of luxury are dearly bought by oppression. Proud combinations against the laws of humanity and the providence of God shall be broken as tow. The builders of Babel were confounded. The conspiracies of Voltaire and his infidel school have been overthrown. In our day all social compacts and private bargains in the cause of injustice will be crushed by the irresistible power of God. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." **IV. Debauchery in social conduct.** "Let us drink." Men reap a poor harvest from cruelty and oppression when they spend it to gratify their lusts. Making merry at the cost of extortion will only mingle bitterness with wine. Tyrants to the poor are often slaves to their own passions. "Cruelty and sensuality are well matched. Inflamed passions crave for inflaming drink, and this again sets on fire the whole course of nature, and disposes to deeds of violence and shame. Nor must it be forgotten that men and women naturally mild and kind commit the most ferocious (otherwise unaccountable) acts under the influence of alcoholic drink, which exerts all the foreign tyranny of diabolical possession." **V. Life terminating in great calamities.** Consider the end of these proud oppressors. "So the days shall come upon you that he will take you away with hooks and your children with fish-hooks." Led as an ox to the slaughter, taken as fish out of the water, neither power nor number can keep them from sudden and violent destruction. 1. *Calamities fixed in time.* The days hold on their steady course and advance closer and closer to the sinner. They are determined in God's purpose and will be fitted in God's providence. 2. *Calamities with great sacrifice.* From security they shall violently be taken away to a land of oppression. Their stores of violence would be cast away from their palaces. When life is at stake, treasures of gold are of no worth. "A thousand pounds for any one who will save my life," cried a young lady in the wreck of the *London*. It is too late often, and none can flee away. 3. *Calamities from which none can escape.* They shall rush from one palace to another. Some think to be the meaning, cast themselves into one place after another and find no shelter. In wild confusion, without help and hope, they will run through the breach of the city, like a herd of cows through a fence. 4. *Calamities entailed upon posterity.* "Your children with fish-hooks." People may survive in their descendants sometimes, but reckless must be that life which sweeps away posterity. Sinners entangle themselves in their own devices, and bring the judgments of God upon their families. Riches are small, and strong palaces are defenceless in the hour of death. Those who boast of wealth, and act in cruelty towards others, will be carried away without ransom and without hope

> "To the vile dust from whence they sprung,
> Unwept, unhonour'd, and unsung."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. God's intimate acquaintance with men. 1. He discerns their character. "Ye kine of Bashan." Pride, wantonness, and effeminacy. 2. He detects their sins. Specifies one by one. 3. He knows their residence. "In the mountain of Samaria." "God knows where men live. Let us seek to make our houses such as he will look on with pleasure" [*Hall in loco*]. "I know thy abode, and thy going out and thy coming in, and thy rage against me" (Is. xxxvii. 28).

Vers. 2, 3. 1. Destruction inevitable. "Saith the Lord." 2. Destruction by meanest instruments. Fish dragged by the hook, Herod destroyed by worms. 3. Destruction vindicated by God's character. Holiness is offended by sin, and pledged to vindicate its own honour. "God swears by that holiness which they had profaned in themselves, and which they had caused to be profaned in others. God sware by himself. For he is the supreme uncreated Justice and Holiness. This justice each, in his degree, should imitate and maintain on earth, and these they had sacrilegiously violated and overthrown" [*Pusey*].

Vers. 1—3. From the whole learn— 1. In proportion to the prosperity here will be the misery of the wicked hereafter. 2. In proportion to their luxury here will be their poverty hereafter. 3. In proportion to their sins here, will be their punishment hereafter [*Treasury of David*].

"O luxury!
Bane of elated life, of affluent states,
What dreary change, what ruin is not thine?"
[*Dyer.*]

HOMILETICS.

UNGODLY LIFE AND FORMAL WORSHIP.—*Verses* 4, 5.

The prophet again turns to the people, and in bitter irony bids them pursue their course. The words describe the worship of Israel, and afford a specimen of address to desperate sinners.

I. **The spirit in which they are uttered.** 1. A spirit of *irony*. "Come to Bethel," offer your sacrifices, and go on in your sin. It is sometimes right to cherish this spirit. Elijah to the prophets of Baal (1 Kings xviii. 27); Micaiah to the priests of Ahab (xxii. 15); and Christ himself (Matt. vi. 2) found it necessary. "Scorns and taunts are the best answers for serious idolatry," says Bishop Hall. "Holiness will bear us out, in disdainful scoffs and bitterness, against wilful superstition." 2. A spirit of *reproof*. Multiply your sacrifices, and what better will you be? What will they avail you in the day of adversity? When will you learn wisdom? "You shall be ashamed of Bethel, your confidence." II. **The moral condition which they indicate.** Their conduct was in direct opposition to God's will. They thought great devotion would make up for ungodly life. 1. *A self-righteous spirit.* They boasted of their ritual, and proclaimed their zeal and offerings. "So well did they count themselves to stand with God, that there is no mention of sin-offering or trespass-offering." They sought the praise of men, and not the approval of God. Their motives to goodness were derived from their fellow-creatures and not from their Maker. Like the scribes and Pharisees, they worshipped to be seen of men. 2. *An infatuated mind.* Go on; you are resolved to have your own way, whatever God and conscience say; and you may take it. Thus some darken their foolish minds, befool themselves, and are given up to strong delusions, to believe a lie. 3. *An incorrigible life.* Go on; neither judgment nor mercy has any influence upon you; take the consequences. They seemed judicially given up to sin. "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." This is an awful condition, but only a type of that just sentence which will at last be passed against all transgressors. "He that is unjust let him be unjust still, and

he who is filthy let him be filthy still." **III. The character of the worship they describe.** The most wicked do not entirely abandon Christian worship. Fashion and the force of habit constrain them. Israel kept up thank-offerings, but clung to their sins. 1. *Corrupt worship.* The worship of God was mixed with that of idols. The altar of God and the altar at Bethel had each their gifts. So now the adoration of self and graven images is combined with the worship of the sanctuary. Money, pleasure, and popularity rival God. Unworthy motives and glaring errors are cherished in his service. But God will not permit contamination. We must worship him in the beauty of holiness. 2. *Formal worship.* They were devout in sacrifices of thanksgiving and free-will offerings; zealous in their tithes, punctual in their ritual, and superabundant in their diligence. They were precise in their formalities, but insincere in their hearts. They kept the letter but violated the spirit. Mint and cummin were paid, but the weightier matters of the law, judgment and mercy, were neglected. Sacrifices to God are an insult when the heart is alienated and withheld. "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts." 3. *Will-worship.* They did what God commanded, but in their own way, and at their own places. The preference for Bethel and Gilgal, for priests of the people instead of the sons of Levi, the setting up of the golden calves, and the use of leaven in their worship, made it mere will-worship, unacceptable and dishonouring to God. The end of true worship is to please God, but if we please ourselves we offend him. "The command, therefore, to please themselves, as they will have it so, marks the utter rejection of the worshippers." 4. *Sinful worship.* All their work was transgression, and the repetition of their service was a multiplying of transgression: their worship only added more sin to their violence and frauds. Corrupt religion aggravates guilt; diligence in superstitious devotions ripens for destruction; and self-will in anti-scriptural forms leads to utter rejection of God. "Though ye offer me burnt-offerings and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them."

> "The holier worship which he deigns to bless
> Restores the lost, and binds the spirit broken,
> And feeds the widow and the fatherless" [*Whittier*].

The Corrective Measures of God's Providence.—*Verses* 6—11.

In these verses God describes the different corrective measures which he employed for the purpose of effecting a change in the Israelites, and at the close of each mentioned in the series, the obstinate impenitence, under the influence of which they persisted in their wicked courses, is emphatically marked by the declaration, *Yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord;* such repetition gives great force to the reprehension [*Elzas*]. The verses naturally suggest the divisions of the outline.

I. Famine. Cleanness of teeth and want of bread indicate scarcity of flesh and dearth of corn. The famine was everywhere, "in all your places." This was no accidental failure of crops, nor owing to a combination of second causes. It was the work of God himself, who gives daily bread. "Man's life," says Calvin, "is not shut up in bread, but hangs on the sovereign will and good pleasure of God." **II. Dearth and scarcity of water.** They would remember times of plenty, when they had water "every man from his own well and from his own cistern." How minute the circumstances of the calamity. 1. *The time is specified.* "Three months to the harvest." A time when most needed to ripen corn and grain. "This is utterly ruinous to the hopes of the farmer. A little earlier or a little later would not be so fatal, but drought *three months before harvest* is entirely destructive" [*The Land and the Book*]. 2. *The inequality is given.* In one city and not in another; upon one field to fertilize it; not upon another, which remained unproductive. Thus were they urged to reflect upon God. In sovereign

mercy he holds the key of the clouds, to open and shut at pleasure. Every drop of rain is measured and sent by Divine direction to its destination. He gives rain from heaven and fruitful seasons (Acts xiv. 17). 3. *The distress is noticed.* Inhabitants in some places were frustrated in their hopes; necessitated to go far away to seek for water, and found only a scanty and insufficient supply. Water, free to all now, was withheld from them. In trembling fear, and weak through toil, they begged from city to city. God can wither our harvests, withhold Divine influence from our schools and churches, and create natural and spiritual distress throughout the nation. "Thou art the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation." **III. Blasting and mildew.** Blight would follow from scarcity of rain. 1. *Vegetation suffered.* The gardens which they cultivated in neglect of God, the fruit which was appearing to reward their toil, and the olive trees which they watched with care, were smitten by the blast. 2. *Insects abounded.* "The palmer-worm" and putrefaction devoured the fruits of the ground. Malignant air and voracious animals destroyed fruitful fields and prosperous vineyards. "The Lord shall smite thee . . . with blasting and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish" (Deut. xxviii. 22). **IV. Pestilence and sword.** Pestilence such as visited Egypt fell upon them. Young men, the hope of the country, were slain in war. Horses on which they depended were taken from them by a victorious foe. The mighty hosts which they assembled in pride were like sheep for the slaughter. The stench of men and horses, unburied on the field, poisoned the air and polluted the land. Yet this did not humble nor reclaim them. "He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence" (Ps. lxxviii. 50). **V. Total overthrow by earthquake.** *They* seemed insensible, but the solid ground beneath them trembled with unwonted motion. The houses above their heads fell in utter confusion. Some of the inhabitants were buried in the ruins or smitten by the lightning. Others who narrowly escaped were like brands plucked out of the fire. Some were overthrown like the people in Sodom; but few, like Lot, were rescued from the danger. Yet notwithstanding these terrible judgments and displays of Divine anger Israel did not return to God. These last chastisements, which typify more than anything else the great judgment-day, have failed. Therefore they must prepare to meet God as the Judge and Ruler of the Universe.

> "Not thou, O Lord, from us, but we
> Withdraw ourselves from thee" [*French*].

CHASTISEMENTS WITHOUT REFORMATION.—*Verse* 11.

"Yet have ye not returned unto me," is the cry full of grief and tenderness repeatedly uttered. God designed to bring them to repentance, but they were incorrigible and chastised in vain.

I. Man is distant from God. This is not a natural fact merely. Estrangement from God is a state of mind. The miser loving gold, the worldling drinking pleasure, and the atheist denying God—each has a specific state of mind characterized by the distinct evil. In the heart is fixed opposition to God. The will and the word of God are distasteful to the sinner. The lower sentiments and nobler faculties are influenced by his apostasy. The mind is ingrossed with things like our nature. Men talk of fancied reverence and adoration for God; but spiritually they live "having no hope, and without God in the world." **II. God seeks to bring man to himself.** The Scriptures abound with facts and figures to illustrate this truth. God seeks to recover the fallen and save the lost. 1. *By mercy.* Mercies given in Christ and multiplied day by day. Good beyond desert and degree to bring to God. "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." 2. *By judgment.* Judgments national and personal, severe, many and long-continued. God chastens in body and mind, in social and family circumstances, that

we may not go astray. "Man's wisdom consists in observing God's unalterable appointments and suiting himself to them," says Scott. "In the day of adversity consider." **III. Man is often chastised without returning to God.** The innumerable judgments of Israel begot no repentance. Nothing external will make us wise without due improvement of it. Sensibility to bodily pain is one thing, sorrow of heart another. "I will at this time send all my plagues upon thy heart." God visits us in many ways, sends bereavement in the family and disappointment in business. And perhaps there is room for repetition day by day. The same judgments have continued and new ones been inflicted, but we have not returned to God. This proves—1. Great guilt. 2. Great provocation. 3. Great danger. The voice resounds still in Scripture and providence. "*Yet* ye have not returned unto me."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 1—11. *The three charges.* I. Oppression of the poor (vers. 1—3). II. Corruption of worship (vers. 4, 5). III. Incorrigibleness under Divine judgments (vers. 6—11). Learn—1. That God has various judgments to exercise a sinful nation. 2. That judgments are changed, not removed, until a return to God. 3. That God is earnest in bringing men to repentance. "A course of sin will not prove a thriving way in the end to any, but especially to the Church, which the Lord will either make a theatre of mercy, or a field of blood, and he hath many rods for that end; for as they liked their way of sin (ver. 5), so he *also* chooseth their judgments and pours out a quiver-full of them upon them" [*Hutcheson*].

Ver. 7. *Withered.* So will it ever be in the Church, which is God's vineyard, if ministers give no doctrine and God no blessing, fitly resembled to rain on regard, 1. of cooling heat; 2. quenching thirst; 3. cleansing the air; 4. allaying the winds; 5. mollifying and mellowing the parched earth; 6. causing all things to grow and fructify. This rain of righteousness goes sometimes by coasts as here; God withholding showers, though clouds be full and likely enough to drop down in abundance (see Ezek. iii. 26; Hos. ix. 7; Prov. xvi. 1) [*Trapp*].

Ver. 10. *After the manner of Egypt.* 1. Slaughter of young men. 2. The land filled with pestilence and locusts. 3. Harassed in this defenceless condition by the incursions from Assyria.

Ver. 11. *A firebrand plucked.* 1. A scene of danger—"burning." 2. An act of mercy—"plucked." 3. A present uncertainty. Once in danger, now rescued. Will you continue where you are, or escape entirely to refuge?

The words will apply—1. *Temporally.* "They may recall a striking deliverance in God's providence, when others were taken and they were left. A shipwreck—a battle—an awful accident involving loss of human life—a sickness from which many others around them died" [*Ryan*]. 2. *Spiritually.* Every sinner saved is a firebrand plucked from the burning. This should prompt—1. To gratitude. 2. To earnestness in rescuing others from "the wrath of God," which "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

HOMILETICS.

The Firemen of God, or the Strange Parallel between Fire and Sin.

Fire—what is there in the moral world to which it answers? But one thing, that is, wickedness—sin against God—sin in a man's life. Against this evil God calls all his servants to be firemen. "Put out the fires of sin," is a nobler motto than any blazoned on the symbols of commerce and art.

I. **Consider the analogy between fire and sin.** 1. *You cannot weigh*

the scales. You cannot grasp it, yet it exists—you can feel and see it work. You cannot rate sin by horse power, but you feel its withering, burning influence in the soul. 2. *Fire becomes sometimes almost invisible.* So with sin. In the glare and noon-day of busy life some fail to see it. The dimness of religious truth to the mind is a terrible monitor of what sin is doing in the heart. 3. *Sin is like fire in its attractions.* A child loves to play with fire, unconscious of danger. Men toy with sin, which has indulgence for appetite, mirth to amuse, feasts for gluttons, and revelry for the reckless. 4. *Sin consumes like fire.* It burns down men instead of houses; the man vanishes, and only the animal, the brute, the sensualist is left. 5. *Sin spreads like a fire.* Wicked thoughts, evil suggestions, are the sparks that kindle the fires of sin in the soul and set communities in a blaze. 6. *Sin inflicts pain like a fire.* It burns, stings, and agonizes its victim. Here, in the naked conscience and despairing death, is the germ of the fire that is never quenched. 7. *Sin, like fire, defaces what it touches.* 8. *Sin must be resisted like fire.* It is an evil to be put out in heart and life. 9. *Sin, like fire, if you wait too long to put it out, will render attempts useless.* The soul should not be left till sin has mastery. In this world men are often beyond reasonable prospect of repentance. **II. Sin is the fire, but the sinner is the fuel.** Ye were as a firebrand. 1. A firebrand *is combustible*, or it never would have been a firebrand. So with the sinner's heart. 2. A firebrand has been *already exposed* to the fire. It is charred and blackened, and bears the marks of sin. So the sinner. 3. A firebrand has *offered no effectual resistance* to the flames. The sinner has not resisted sin. He is bound, and by the grace of God can resist. 4. A firebrand is ready to be *kindled anew*, after it has been once quenched. A spark may kindle the soul. 5. A firebrand is *in the process of being consumed*, and a little longer will finish it. So with the sinful heart. 6. A firebrand only needs to be let alone, and it will burn to ashes. Leave the soul to sin—the ruinous power of its own lusts—and its ruin will be complete. 7. A firebrand is a dangerous thing, if its sparks and coals come in contact with anything else. The sinner destroyeth much good. **III. But even firebrands may be saved.** Sinners are sometimes plucked out of a desperate condition—Mary Magdalen, the thief on the cross, Saul of Tarsus—but the work is God's. A converted soul is a miracle of grace. Firemen! guardians of our dwellings against a subtle and dangerous foe, be ready to rush to the scene of conflagration, when the alarm is given, night or day! The fires of sin burn all around, and perhaps within you unchecked. Be God's firemen, and help to quench it. Nothing but the blood of Christ can put out the fires. Repent and believe, and you shall be saved. [From *The Preacher's Treasury.*]

THREATENED EVIL ESCAPED BY RETURN TO GOD.—*Verse* 12.

"When he has said, 'This will I do to thee,' he is silent as to what he will do, in order that whilst Israel is left in uncertainty as to the particular kind of punishment (which is all the more terrible because all kinds of things are imagined), it may repent of its sins, and so avert the things which God threatens here" [*Jerome*]. The words indicate—

I. An expression of anger. "*Therefore*," since ye persist in rebellion, regardless of former judgments and respites, "*thus* will I do." Judgment must follow judgment until there is a full end. God's hand is still lifted up, and the threat is the more severe, because nothing is mentioned. If a smitten people continue impenitent, and will not be corrected nor reclaimed, God will prosecute his work and inflict more plagues. His judgments are sadder or lighter according to our conduct under them, and terrible are those strokes which follow inflicted chastisement. "Thou hast called as in a solemn day my terrors round about, so that in the day of the Lord's anger none escaped nor remained" (Lam. ii. 22). **II. An exhortation to repentance.** When God is about to strike he waits to be pre-

vented. Though hardened in sin, and insensible under Divine correction, men may repent, and are exhorted to return to God. Repentance is not impossible. Set about it, prepare to meet God, and he will pardon you. "If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: then will I remember my covenant." **III. A motive to reconciliation.** God can still be met—though punishment is threatened, God's design and feelings may be seen in it. He chastens to restore. Sins may abound, but "His mercy endureth for ever." He is willing to be *thy* God. He waits to be gracious and to be reconciled to thee. "Noah, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." Josiah endeavoured to ward off the threatened judgment by humiliation before God. But some foresee impending evil and escape not (Prov. xxii. 3). There is a hiding-place in Christ. Let chastisements awaken you from slumber, and urge you to lay hold of the hope set before you. "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

Preparation to meet God.

I. The solemn event. Not an ordinary event, not the meeting of man with man, but of man with his Maker. We have to meet God on earth, and especially at the judgment-day, when the atheist and the scorner, the righteous and the wicked, each one will see him for himself and not for another. **II. The needful preparation.** If in judgment, prepare, for how can we contend against him? If in penitence, prepare, for he will meet us in forgiveness. A preparation of heart and life are necessary. The sinner must be reconciled; the soul must be renewed and the life be holy. "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." **III. The motives to enforce the preparation.** 1. *The greatness of God.* If he be such as here described, what folly to oppose him, and what an argument to make our peace with him. 2. *The providence of God.* "Because I will do this, therefore prepare;" that is, God's providential dealings with us are a motive to urge preparation to meet him. God comes near in judgments and great events. We should consider our ways. The doctrines of the gospel and the providences of life often fail to rouse attention. Men sleep unconscious of the presence of God and the impending danger. If we do not meet him as a Friend we shall have to meet him as a Judge. "Prepare to meet thy God."

Prepare to meet thy God.—*Verses* 12, 13.

Man forgets God. Scripture denounces this, and the great aim of its precepts, history, threatenings, and promises, is to produce and cherish the habit of remembering God. The text calls to remember God, is often applied exclusively to the meeting of God in another world; but from the context it applies to what goes on in this world also. Consider, therefore, how to meet God as he comes near. **I. During our time of probation on earth.** It is common for those who dispute the reality of God's coming to assert that he is too highly exalted to notice insignificant creatures. But in Scripture God's greatness and man's littleness often combine to illustrate this truth. 1. *In the way of repentance.* A sinful course is turning back from God, fleeing from a God of mercy to a God of anger. He calls the careless and impenitent to meet him. (1) *Quickly.* Now a day of grace in which outward calls combine with inward connections. This time is precious, and will be succeeded by "a night wherein no man can work." (2) *Carefully.* "Let us search and try our ways." Rush not carelessly and without thought to the throne of God. "Take with you words." (3) *Decidedly.* With the firm conviction that in no other way can peace and salvation be found. 2. *In the way of temporal blessings.* It may please him to let our life pass peaceably on—to keep off apprehended danger—to make the cup of sorrow pass from us, that we drink it not. Awful accidents and fearful calamities may have plunged others into misery, but we

go on from day to day in security and peace. Meet God in a spirit of gratitude and praise. 3. *In the way of temporal sorrow.* (1) Endeavour to *turn judgment aside by humble prayer* (Amos vii. 2—6). (2) To hear it as *coming from God.* We do not meet God if we look to second causes; nor profit if we do not see his hand and will. 4. *In the use of the means of grace God meets his people.* There is no peradventure like Balaam's in the believing use of means. Special blessings rest upon family worship, social and public worship, and when we obey the injunction "this do in remembrance of me." But we lose much from not *preparing to meet God in ordinances.* Prepare with reverence and godly fear, and with earnest expectation. 5. We meet God *in the works of righteousness* (Is. lxiv. 5). Thus we see it our duty to meet God during the time of probation. In Christ we meet him in repentance, and find him reconciled—in prosperity he calls for gratitude and praise—in judgment we bow with submission and endeavour to turn it aside—in the means of grace we should meet him with glad reverence, and earnest expectation of good things from his Fatherly bounty. **II. Prepare to meet him after the time of trial is over.** 1. Very solemn and awakening is the thought of meeting God then. Here we meet him in his works and ways, *there* we shall meet God himself. Remember this in the engrossing concerns of uncertain life. Eternity, and not time, is the stage of our existence. 2. After death cometh the judgment, when we must "be made manifest" before the tribunal of Christ. Some will meet God in anger, and cry for rocks to fall on them; others will meet a God in mercy. No righteousness will stand them but "the righteousness of God." Have we that righteousness? Is the thought of that day a part of your daily meditation? Give diligence to be found in him in peace and security. "Keep yourselves in the love of God, *looking for* the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." This waiting frame of mind will be one of the greatest helps to prepare, and one of the surest signs that you are prepared to "meet your God" [*Ryan*].

THE DISPENSATIONS OF PROVIDENCE CARRYING OUT THE DESIGNS OF GRACE. —*Verse* 13.

In true repentance we must have right views of God and his claims. The prophet here describes God in the resources of creation and the wonders of providence to induce Israel to think of him and prepare to meet him. "*For*" if mercy move not, let majesty. God is great, and can carry out his designs of love—

I. By his mighty power in creation. "He that formeth the mountains," &c. 1. *Power in the past.* Before the mountains were brought forth God was. He created the solid parts of the earth, and reared the everlasting hills. "Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains." They owe firmness and stability to him. The Alps and the Andes are "girded" and preserved from falling down by his power. 2. *Power in the present.* "And createth the wind." The heathens believed in an inferior God, whom Jupiter appointed a store-keeper to raise and still the winds at pleasure. But God "bringeth forth the wind out of his treasuries" (Jer. x. 12). The winds and the seas obey him. "He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still." The most solid and the most subtle, the mildest and the most terrific, agents were created by God. If we read rightly we see not only power but *mind* in the works of God. Men are thus encouraged to flee unto him. The salvation expected from the hills typifies deliverance from sin and protection in Christ (Ps. lxxxix. 11, 12). Control over winds sets forth his dominion over minds. All creation manifests his beneficence to men. **II. By his unceasing activity in providence.** "That maketh the morning darkness." God not only created, but governs all things according to the counsel of his will. He is unceasingly active for the good of his creatures. "My

Father worketh hitherto and I work." 1. *Literally* God makes the morning dark. He spreads the clouds and overcasts the sky. He creates light and darkness, and gives day and night. 2. *Providentially* God makes the morning dark. The morning of joy and prosperity is turned into the night of sorrow and distress. The sunshine of Divine favour may be followed by retributive judgments. It is folly to trust in any means of deliverance but his. Our expectations may be darkened by unlooked-for changes. Everything that is joyous and beautiful may be effaced by darkness. "Seek him that . . . turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night."

"For we have also our evening and our morn."

III. By his omniscient presence with men. "And declareth unto man what is his thought." He can read the heart and understand the thought afar off (Ps. cxxxix. 2). We hide our sins and do not wish to know our hearts; but "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." He reads and reveals us to ourselves and sets our sins in order before us. "The thought of God as a Creator or Preserver without," says Pusey, "affects man but little. To man a sinner, far more impressive than all majesty of creative power, is the thought that God knows his inmost soul. God knows our thoughts more truly than we know ourselves." There is no deceiving him in our conduct. We have to do with One who searches the heart. "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins" (Jer. xvii. 10; Ps. vii. 9). The moral government of God is ever administered on the principle that man is accountable for his thoughts. The law of God weighs the purposes of men and the dispensations of God. "Give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

"On human hearts he bends a jealous eye."

IV. By his supreme control in all things. "The Lord, the God of hosts, is his name." Not only the God of Israel, but the supreme Ruler of men and Disposer of all things. 1. *He is supreme in the universe.* "The Lord of hosts." Head over all principalities and powers in heaven and earth. He has being in himself, and is the fountain of being and blessedness to others. "Who is over all, God blessed for ever." 2. *He makes all things subservient to his purpose.* "Treadeth upon the high places of the earth." He walks on the sea (Job ix. 8), and on the wings of the wind (Ps. civ. 3). He subdues the proud and dethrones the mighty. Whatever is eminent and exalts itself against him he will put down. He reigns above all creatures, controls the highest spheres of power, and everything around him stands ready to execute his will. Thus the prophet sees in the course of nature the will of God, links the physical with the moral events, and makes the one find its loftiest end in the other. National calamities are revelations of God's wrath. But these only endanger the material welfare of a people. A God of transcendant greatness sends them to draw us to himself. Nothing will avail before him but righteousness and truth. Prepare to meet him with joy and not with grief.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1. There is not a word in our language which expresses more detestable wickedness than *oppression* [*Butler*]. Mr Cecil says that he often "had a sleepless night from having seen an instance of cruelty in the day."

"My ear is pain'd,
My heart is sick with every day's report
Of wrong and outrage with which earth is filled."

Vers. 4, 5. What a sting is *there*—"this liketh you!" how it should pierce the conscience of every sinner—"for this *liketh* you, O ye children of Israel!" Far indeed was everything like levity from the prophet's mind in treating such a subject as the sinfulness of the people; far enough was he from making a mock of sin as fools do. It was holy sorrow

that prompted the irony; it was with deep solemnity of soul that he wielded that cutting weapon—and withal he could be touching and tender in expostulation [*Stoughton*].

Vers. 6—10. We look to second causes and impute our years of dearth to wet and cold, to hot and parching seasons, to cycles of weather, to comets, and many other accidents, some real and others imaginary, and thus wilfully conceal from our view the power of God, who blesseth a land and maketh it to bring forth fruit abundantly, and who "turneth a fruitful field into barrenness for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." The acts of God's providence are as certainly a part of his administration now as in former ages, and as directly affect each individual of the race as they did the children of Abraham. It is to those who are subdued under his rebukes that he sends *his word* to heal them. They who watch the ruling hand of God shall become wiser in reading his purposes and their own necessities [*Duncan*].

Vers. 12, 13. The Rev. Mr Madan was desired one evening, by some of his companions who were with him at a coffee-house, to go and hear Mr John Wesley, who they were told was to preach in the neighbourhood, and to return and exhibit his manners and discourse for their entertainment. Mr M., educated for the bar, went with that intention, and just as he entered the place, Wesley named his text, "Prepare to meet thy God," with a solemnity of accent which struck him, and which inspired a seriousness that increased as the good man exhorted his hearers to repentance. Mr M. returned to the coffee-room, and was asked, "if he had taken off the old Methodist?" "No, gentlemen," said he, "but he has taken me off;" and from that time he left their company and became a converted man [*Whitecross*].

Ver. 13. "I never had a sight of my soul," said the Emperor Aurelius, "and yet I have a great value for it, because it is discoverable by its operations; and by my constant experience of the power of God, I have a proof of his being, and a reason for my veneration" [*Whitecross*]. Let us incessantly bear in mind, that the only thing we have really to be afraid of, is fearing anything more than God [*Book of the Fathers*].

CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **This word**] A mournful song (2 Sam. i. 17—27). **Take up**] Lit. lift up as if to cast down upon them. **2. Virgin**] The Israelite state unsubdued by foreigners. **Fallen**] Violent death (2 Sam. i. 19—25), a figure of the overthrow of the kingdom. **Rise**] in the existing order. **3. Went**] to war. The depopulated city is touchingly described (Deut. xxviii. 62). **4. Live**] Not only remain alive, but possess real favour. **5. Bethel**] "A strong dissuasive from idolatry derived from the predicted fall of the objects and places of false worship." **6. Lest**] Danger threatened. **Like fire**] consuming everything before it (Deut. iv. 24: Is. x. 17: Lam. ii. 3). **7—9.**] God in his omnipotence in contrast with the ungodly people, indicating that he who can destroy should be feared. **Wormwood**] Justice embittered, corrupted, and made hateful (cf. ch. vi. 12: Deut. xxix. 17). **8.**] God in creation, moral government, and judicial procedure described almost in words like Job ix. 9. **10. Hate**] the reprover who condemns their sins; Amos himself, or judges at the gate who put down injustice (Is. xxix. 21: Jer xvii. 19). **11. Take**] Burdensome taxes levied in kind from the *wheat* of the needy to pamper the lusts of the great [*Henderson*]. **12. Bribe**] Lit. a price to deliver from sentence. "The judges allowed the rich murderer to purchase exemption from capital punishment by the payment of atonement money, whilst they bowed down the right of the poor." This illegal (Num. xxxv. 31). **13. Silence**] "A chosen silence towards vile corrupters of law and justice who will nothing mend though reproved; or silence before God, owning his justice in punishing such sinners" [*Poole*]. **14. Spoken**] They fancied that God was with them by virtue of

the covenant with Abraham (John viii. 39). **15. Perhaps**] indicates difficulty in their case, not uncertainty with God (cf. Gen. xvi. 2; Joel ii. 13). Peradventure (Ex. xxxii. 3). **Remnant**] preserved in the approaching judgment, as Joel iii. 5: Is. vi. 13; x. 21—23. **16. Therefore**] if ye seek not God, there will be lamentation not only by professional mourners, but in the streets of the city, in all towns of the kingdom, and in places where joy is expected. **17. Pass through**] as in Egypt (Ex. xii. 12; Nah. i. 12), taking vengeance and creating death wail. **18. Woe**] to the confident who deceive themselves with false hopes. **Desire**] Deriding the prediction of the prophet (Jer. xvii. 15; Ezek. xii. 22). "It was an impious daring of God to do his worst" [*Elzas*]. **19.**] Two figures from pastoral life illustrate the false hope of escape. Fleeing from a lion to meet a bear means that whoever escapes one danger will fall into another. The bear spares none, and the serpent's bite in the hand is fatal. "In that day every place is full of danger and death; neither in-doors nor out-of-doors is any one safe; for out-of-doors lions and bears prowl about and in-doors snakes lie hidden, even in the holes of the walls" [*Corn. à Lap.*]. **20. Bright.**] *i. e.* to those who do not turn from evil. **21.**] Festivals and sacrifices will not avert judgments. **Your feasts**] of human origin, not Divine appointment (Is. i. 10—15); the expression of Divine abhorrence is most emphatic. **23. Noise**] as singing is contemptuously called. **24. Run**] judgments like a flood over the land [*Keil*]. Others take it as an exhortation to practise justice and truth. **25. Have**] Lit. *Did ye*, equivalent to denial, some; others, not entire suspension of sacrifice, but mixed with idolatry. From of old they had been recreant to God. Their present offensive worship was only a continuation of the idolatry in the wilderness. Their sins were the very sins of their forefathers (Ezek. xx. 39). **26. Borne**] aloft in pomp, the portable shrine or model tabernacle. The idolatry censured is of Egyptian origin. A literal god of stars cannot be proved [*Lange*]. **27.**] Banishment of the people far beyond the borders of their own land. **Beyond**] the capital of Syria, in which you trust for help instead of me (Acts vii. 43): combines into one the several passages from prophecy. A most unlikely event then; but Thus saith the Lord indicates its certainty.

HOMILETICS.

The Funeral Dirge.—*Verses* 1—3.

"In order to impress Israel the more, Amos begins this his third appeal by a *dirge* over its destruction, mourning over those who were full of life and thought themselves safe. A dirge like that of David over Saul and Jonathan, over what once was lovely and mighty, but which had perished" [*Pusey*].

I. The death of the nation. Israel was spiritually dead and debased. Like a virgin, she had lost her purity and fealty to God. 1. *The state was destroyed.* "She hath fallen." Fallen by her sins and from her dignity. (1) *Inwardly destroyed.* "She is forsaken upon her land." Her true interests were neglected by her friends. She was forsaken by her own rulers and guides. With all her strength and resources she was morally helpless and none could defend her. (2) *Violently destroyed.* "Cast down upon her soil." She was prostrated by inward tendency and outward force. "Then will I leave thee upon the land, I will cast thee forth upon the open field" (Ezek. xxix. 5; xxxii. 4). (3) *Hopelessly destroyed.* "There is none to raise her up." Weakened by moral corruption and intestine strife; despised by men and forsaken by God, she could rise no more. Nothing can prop up a rotten nation, nor save a doomed people. Ichabod may be written when God has departed from us. 2. *The people were decimated.* The city from which thousands went equipped for war could scarcely muster one hundred. The people, cut off by sword and pestilence, could not furnish more than a tithe of their population. One common doom befell larger and smaller cities. The whole kingdom was helpless and ruined. "And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the Lord thy God."

> "Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
> Where wealth accumulates, and men decay."

II. The mourning for the nation. God is gracious in showing to us our sins, and if we heed the accusation we may escape the lamentation. But people are obstinate and opposed to God. 1. *The prophet mourned.* "This word which *I* take up against you." He views the nation as dead, and he attends the funeral

He mourns not in poetic words, but in deep feeling. Every faithful minister at some time or other does the same. Samuel mourned over Saul; David wept because men kept not the law of God; Jeremiah grieved, and Paul had "great heaviness and continual sorrow." Lamentations over fallen churches and wails over lost souls are most touching and too common! "I will weep bitterly; labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people." 2. *The people mourned.* Sad was the change and most distressing the condition of Israel. Sorrow entered every family; the state was deprived of its subjects; and there was none to help in her degraded condition. "If," says a writer on this book, "an enemy who had depopulated our towns, and killed our fathers and mothers, were to come to our abodes, how would all rise to ruin such an enemy. We should do as the Jews did by Paul when they looked on him as an enemy (Acts xxi. 27, 28), 'they stirred up all the people and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help!' So should we encourage each other against sin and suppress it, saying:—'Magistrates, ministers, men and brethren, help; sin is what destroys our people, wastes our cities, unpeoples our towns, opposeth the laws, and brings confusion everywhere.'"

Seeking God and Renouncing Sin.—*Verses* 4—6.

Departure from God is the root of all sorrow. Reformation therefore must be radical and not formal. God has not utterly abandoned Israel. He speaks as "our God," ready on our return to him to deliver and bless. "Seek ye me and ye shall live."

I. The urgent request. The prophet repeatedly urges them to seek God (vers. 4, 6, 14), from whom they had wandered and whom they had offended. 1. *God is the object sought.* We must seek him not for any selfish ends, not for gifts, nor for anything out of him. What is the world without him? All may be found and enjoyed in him. Some pursue pleasure, riches, and wealth, others find in God their chief good. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." 2. *God must be sought earnestly.* The seeking is diligent and anxious. Infinite good is more desirable than created good. We must not seek God anyhow, but with earnestness and perseverance. The pursuit is not an indefinite desire, the mere natural working of the mind, but an intense longing for God. "Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." II. The needful caution. "But seek not Bethel," &c. Israel sought God at Bethel; but idolatry is opposed to seeking God, and must be renounced. The worship of God cannot be reconciled with the worship of Baal. 1. *Outward forms will not avail.* Gilgal and Bethel were ancient places, but empty forms. The truth once taught there had become powerless, and Israel had ceased to obey. Men may plead beauty, antiquity, and prevalence of forms; but we are admonished to abandon them all and trust to the living God. Idolatrous customs will ensure and increase our condemnation. They are an abomination to God. "Seek ye *me*," and "pass not to Beersheba." 2. *False hopes will disappoint.* Bethel was not the house of God. Gilgal would go into captivity, and Beersheba would soon be in ruins. The pleasant things of Gilgal passed into the hands of the enemy. All hopes of residence there were disappointed, and bitter was the remorse of the people. Schemes of worldly happiness and forms of idolatry will utterly fail. False confidences allure men to destruction, do not avert danger nor quench the fire of Divine anger against sin. Idols of every kind are vanity. An idol is nothing in the world (1 Cor. viii. 4; x. 19); and "they that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy." III. The encouraging promise. "And ye shall live." 1. *Ye shall escape danger.* If the fire broke out none could quench it. Bethel, the centre of idolatry, would be consumed. But if they sought God, they would escape and be

delivered from calamities. The sinner can only be saved from eternal death in Christ. For "who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" 2. *Ye shall obtain God's favour.* We may be delivered from outward danger, from sickness and distress, yet not redeemed from sin—preserved in natural existence, but deprived of real enjoyment. Life in any sense is good, for "a living dog is better than a dead lion!" The soul can only live when converted, refreshed, and cured of its ills. "Your heart shall live that seek God." In his favour is life, and "thy lovingkindness is better than life."

Divine Justice a Consuming Fire.—*Verse* 6.

This verse is an awful picture of sin and Divine retribution which breaks forth in violence upon ungodly nations.

I. The fuel. "The house of Joseph." Sinners make themselves fuel for the flame, ripen themselves for destruction. Rotten and unfruitful branches of the Church will be burned. "Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them, they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame." **II. The conflagration.** "Lest he break out like fire." 1. *The Divine nature* is like fire. "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 28, 29; Is. xxxiii. 14). Holy anger and holy love are found in God. He that is light and love may become, by the power of his wrath, a consuming fire. "A fire goeth before him and burneth his enemies round about" (Ps. xcvii. 3: Deut. iv. 24). 2. *The Divine procedure* is like a fire. When God is provoked to anger judgments will burn the wicked like chaff. Pestilence and war ravage and waste like fire. "The material of sorrow and distress accumulates from period to period. Violation of God's laws, followed by disregard for social duties, prepares both governments and people for tumult and war. The spark of discontent falls on some portion of the mass, suddenly it blazes forth, and is rapidly communicated from one part to another, till everywhere the signs of woe are seen, 'blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke.'"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 4. Such as find a distance and are seeking to make it up, may not speed at first, yet that should not weaken their hands, nor will they be accounted less penitent, or be further from acceptance, that they are but pursuers and not enjoyers; for, approven repentance here is not to find God, but to *seek* him, and these get the promise, Seek ye me, and ye shall live [*Hutcheson*]. *Seek and live.* Equally simple and definite are the monition and the promise. Man knows what he has to do, and what to expect. Not merely is warning given, but also promise and the reverse. The *gain* is certain if one fulfils the *condition*, but the condition is indispensable [*Lange*]. *Ye shall live.* God's gracious promises must be held before sinners, lest in despair they go from sin to sin. For how can one feel genuine repentance if he has no hope [*Ib.*].

Ver. 5. This is the law of God's dealings with man; He "curses our blessings," if we do not use them aright (Mal. ii. 2). Christ, the Corner Stone, will break to pieces those who fall upon it; and it will grind to powder those on whom it falls (Matt. xxi. 44). Our holiest Gilgals—our Sacraments, our Scriptures, our Sermons, our Sundays—which were designed by God to roll away from us the reproach of Egypt, will be rolled away from us, if we do not use them aright, and will roll us downward into our destruction [*Wordsworth*].

Ver. 6. *Seek.* The oft pressing of a duty imports: 1. The excellency; 2. The necessity; 3. The difficulty of doing it: else what need so many words? [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

JUDGMENT TURNED TO WORMWOOD.—*Verse 7.*

The proper place for these words, many think, is after verse 9. They might be taken in connection with the charges there, or separately as here.

I. The impartial administration of justice is pleasant. Justice is one of the four cardinal virtues, and regarded by Plato as including all human duty. It was made of first importance in the Hebrew code. Laws were given to protect life and property, to secure rich and poor against violence and wrong. It was the duty of the judges to interpret and administer, not to make or give laws. When just laws are obeyed by kings and princes, confidence is strengthened, peace prevails, and judgment is in sweet odour. "For law guards the people and magistrates guard the law," says Bacon. "National happiness must be produced through the influence of religious laws," says South. "The king by judgment establisheth the land." **II. The partial administration of justice is bitter.** Let justice be done though the heavens fall is often the cry. But many cast it down from its lofty position and trample it under-foot. As God's vicegerent it is dethroned in the laws of the nation and the hearts of the people. Partiality and injustice make void the best laws, increase the burdens, and embitter the toils of life. They rob man, disorder society, and offend God. They turn judgment to wormwood. Good laws are a blessing or a curse, a corrupt spring or a fountain of life, as they are administered. "One foul sentence doth more hurt than many foul examples," says Bacon, "for these do but corrupt the stream, the other corrupteth the fountain." "Ye have turned judgment into gall and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock."

"Laws grind the poor and rich men make the law" [*Goldsmith*].

GOD GREATLY TO BE FEARED.—*Verses* 9, 10.

Israel were exhorted to forsake unrighteousness and seek God. The prophet tells them who God is and what he does, that they might know him. He is the Creator and Governor of the universe, infinite in resources and omnipotent in power. How can they contend with *him?* Seek him in penitence, despise not judgment, for he is great and greatly to be feared. For three reasons God is to be sought.

I. God displays omnipotence in the creation of the world. "Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion." Amos read the power of God in the stars and names those well known to shepherds. The Pleiades were arranged in their splendour and Orion was bound in its place by him (Job ix. 9). He created the heavens and all the hosts of them by the breath of his mouth. He keeps the planets and directs their motions. Tempests and fogs, judgments and earthquakes, may darken the sky, but do not hide the power of God. The Divine edict is still in force (Gen. i. 3), preserves and marshals the constellations of heaven. "Canst *thou* bind the sweet influences of Pleiades or loose the bands of Orion" (Job xxxviii. 31)? **II. God displays omnipotence in the government of the world.** He is seen in all its vicissitudes. In multitude and magnitude, in minuteness and mystery, his works are unsearchable. 1. *In changing seasons.* Literally he turns night into day by the rising, and day into night by the setting, sun. We find a constant presence, an abiding power, in the seasons of the year. Creation "is but the projected shadow of a throne that overlooks the high places of the universe, filling them with the changeless splendour of a Moral Presence." In all movements there is no caprice but unchanging law. "He appointeth the moon for seasons, the sun knoweth his going down." 2. *In benevolent designs.* Light and darkness are both necessary. Day and night indicate the perfection of Divine

arrangement. God has "set the one over against the other" that we may appreciate both. In all changes of nature we have benevolent design. So in spiritual seasons, in prosperity and adversity; we have shadows of death and days of rejoicing; "the morning of hope, the noon of enjoyment, and the night of sorrow." Each is given in proportion to our faith and the sovereign will of God, whose work is perfect (Deut. xxxii. 4). 3. *In great calamities.* The flood may not again destroy, but it typified fearful inundations which God "pours out upon the face of the earth." He sends rain in mercy and in judgment. He permits the clouds to send their torrents and the sea to burst its bounds. His power is employed to bless or to punish, to turn the sorrow of the penitent to joy, or the light of the wicked into darkness. Amos predicts a future calamity like that in which God brought in the flood upon the world of the ungodly. "Fear ye not me? saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it, and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?" **III. God displays omnipotence in the retributions of the world.** Those that are strong with sinful strength, that defend their spoil, shall be overcome. Desolation will attack every place that was deemed inaccessible. Man's might is perfect weakness with God. He prevails against the *strong*, rescues the weakest saint, and destroys all vain confidence. Then if man's strength cannot defend him when God is angry—if God's power in creation and in providence is employed in giving retribution to men—what will be the fate of those who trust to their own fortress and rebel against God? Learn—1. How ruinous to resist a God of such majesty and power. 2. To submit to his chastening rod. 3. To seek and adore him in the most severe and hopeless trials. For "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 8. *The shadow of death into morning.* This typifies redemption—1. From *sin*, which is darkness of heart and life. 2. From *spiritual misery* (Is. ix. 1). 3. From *sorrow* and *suffering* (Job xvi. 16; Jer. xiii. 16; Ps. xxiv. 4). 4. From the *grave* (Job iii. 5; xxxiv. 22; xxxviii. 17). "Amos first sets forth the *power* of God, then his *goodness*. Out of every extremity of ill God can, will, does deliver. He who said, let there be light, and there was light, at once changeth any depth of darkness into light, the death darkness of sin into the dawn of grace, the hopeless night of ignorance into the day-star from on high; the night of the grave into the eternal morn of the resurrection which knoweth no setting" [*Pusey*]. So light, when abused or neglected, He so withdraws it, as at times to leave no trace or gleam of it. Conscience becomes benighted, so as to sin undoubtingly: faith is darkened, so that the soul no more even suspects the truth. Hell has no light [*Ib.*].

It is not enough to see God in nature and providence or second causes; but we ought so to see him in them as to commend piety to our hearts and press us to it, therefore the exhortation runs, "*seek him that maketh*," &c. *First*, it is an argument to seek him, that he "*maketh the seven stars*," &c. It is held out—1. That God is worthy and ought to be sought and served, who is not only above men and creatures on earth, but his power is in the heavens. 2. He is able either to ruin or refresh men by means and second causes, which are at a great distance from them, even by the influence of the stars. 3. The very vicissitudes and change of seasons and weather are God's works wherein he is to be seen, and which should invite us to seek him. *Secondly*, his turning the shadow of death into morning and making the day dark with clouds, teacheth that God can change or settle conditions, as he pleaseth; and if he settle, none can shake, and if he shake, none can establish. And therefore the

short path to well-being is to seek him. *Thirdly*, his calling for the waters of the sea and pouring them out, &c., teacheth that God hath showers of comforts and deluges of miseries to pour out as he pleaseth [*Hutcheson*].

Ver. 9. He employs his power and wisdom in vindicating the cause of those who cannot help themselves, and in so remarkable a way, that when the weak have been spoiled by their oppressors, and their oppressors have entrenched themselves in fortified places, even then he causes "the spoiled to come against the fortress." Hence—1. Let the impenitent tremble. 2. Let the righteous "be still." 3. Let those who are moved with fear repent and be saved [*Ryan*].

HOMILETICS.

Manifold and Mighty Sins.—*Verses* 10—13.

The duty pressed from consideration of God's power is still urged on account of Israel's sins and God's judgments upon them. These sins are "manifold" and "mighty," countless in number and aggravating in nature.

I. They hated the public monitor. "They hate him that rebuketh at the gate." Those who reproved in God's house, in courts of justice or in places of concourse, were despised. When wisdom lifted up her voice she was not heard (Prov. i. 21). When men are impatient under reproof and deaf to good counsel it is an evil sign. 1. *They detested the rebuker.* Judges were so wicked, that they could not endure those who opposed or rebuked their unrighteous decisions. Claimants and witnesses who pleaded for equity were insulted. Men who defended innocence and cried against injustice were hated beyond degree. 2. *They abhorred the upright.* Amid general corruption some few, like Noah, witnessed for God and were exposed to ridicule and contempt. Veracity is the bond of society, and all who value the interests of mankind will esteem a truthful man. The example, prayers, and life of the upright are a blessing to any community (Prov. xi. 11). To hate them and put them to silence is the way to ruin. Yet men love darkness rather than light, and cannot endure those who reprove their sins. Ministers become enemies because they tell the truth. They "make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought." **II. They practised shameful oppression.** "Your treading is upon the poor." The poor were persecuted as if enemies to the State. If they sued for justice they could not get it. "He remembered not to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart." 1. *Judges took unlawful bribes.* "They take a bribe." Injustice and violence were connived at; the helpless were trampled in the dust, and the rich unjustly acquitted. He that rules over men must be just and rule in the fear of God. "A bad magistrate deprives us of the blessing of just laws." Sir Matt. Hale could not be corrupted, and Paul would not bribe his judge for freedom (Acts xxiv. 26). "A gift perverteth the ways of judgment." 2. *Judges indulged in unbounded selfishness.* They imprisoned the righteous, and would only release him for money. They robbed the poor to build houses, plant vineyards, and minister to their own luxury. Their mansions of hewn stone were monuments of extortion. They might preserve from disease (Lev. xiv. 34—38), and be free from decay. But men who secure themselves and enlarge their possessions by injustice will destroy both. Those who ruin others to live in grandeur and state will find that they build on false foundations and will be robbed of their possessions. "Thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein; thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof." **III. They necessitated prudent silence.** "Therefore the prudent shall keep silence." We must bear open testimony to holiness and truth; but there is "a time to keep silence and a time to speak."

When pearls are cast before swine, when men are deaf to reproof and all warning is useless, then servants of God keep solemn silence. In times of iniquity and judgment, of danger and distress, silence to man may be a duty; but the prudent will speak to God in secret prayer. "For the Lord our God hath put us to silence and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the Lord."

"Bedewed and silent as a summer's night"

TIMES OF PRUDENT SILENCE.—*Verse* 13.

The prudent man will be well disciplined in mind and speech, will carefully watch for opportunities and improve them. Great wisdom is required to know *when* and how to speak. It is a time to be silent—

I. When reproof is ridiculed. In the treatment of a fool we must restrain ourselves, and neither indulge his folly nor cherish his spirit. Pride should never be reproved with pride, nor passion checked with passion. Discretion is needful in rebuke. "Wise mariners do not hoist sails in every wind," says Bp Hall. Jeremiah turned away from false prophets in silence (xxviii. 11). Christ sets us an example in giving kind answers to rude speeches. "Speak not in the ears of a fool; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words." II. When reproof would increase guilt. Men are often hardened and infatuated; deliberately shut their ears and refuse instruction. Reproof would then only add to their guilt and misery. Christ in mercy withheld his tongue before such persons. It is best to "let them alone." Rebuke might stir up a torrent of abuse and frustrate the design in view. A conceited man needs no direction, thinks his own way right, and follows it to his ruin. 'The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." III. When reproof is silenced by calamities. God's dealings in personal affliction and public judgments call for silence. "It is an evil time." *We* are perhaps to blame and cannot reprove others. Under his frown we must hold our peace (Lev. x. 3). In his mysterious providence we learn to be still (Ps. xlvi. 10). Whatever social or national yoke is put upon us we must "sit alone and keep silence" (Lam. iii. 28). There are times when we must reverently adore God and submit to his chastisements; when the pride of the wicked and the pleading of the righteous are put to silence. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it" (Ps. xxxix. 9; Neh. ix. 33; Heb. xii. 9).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 7—13. To seek *God* and renounce unrighteousness and oppression. To enforce this exhortation three pictures are made to pass in rapid succession before the eye. 1. *The righteous Judge.* They are reminded that Jehovah, whose omnipotent power, as manifested in the heavens and on the earth, is described in majestic terms, selects as the special object of his vengeance the strong oppressor (vers. 8, 9). Ver. 9. Literally, "That flasheth forth destruction upon the strong, and destruction cometh upon the fortress." 2. *The sin judged.* The flagrant maladministration of justice. Claimants or others who sought to maintain the cause of right in the gate, or place of public trial, were rebuked. Truthful witnesses were frowned upon. The poor were trodden under-foot, and justice was sold for burdens, or, as it should rather be rendered, "presents of wheat" (vers. 10, 11 *a*). 3. *The judgment to be inflicted.* Deprivation of all the fruits of their unjust gains and oppressions. They are reminded that though the prudent found it necessary to keep silence in so evil a time, and their deeds thus escaped public exposure, God was acquainted with their "manifold" and "mighty" sins (vers. 11 *b*, 12) [*The Preacher's Lantern*].

Ver. 12. "I know your manifold transgressions," &c. 1. *The sins of some men.* Manifold and mighty. Sins

committed with a mighty hand and a haughty spirit. The disobedience of Pharaoh, the "rage" of Sennacherib, and the pride of Herod the Great. Sins injurious to men and offensive to God. The mighty sins of the text and those mentioned by James (v. 7—10). 2. *God's intimate knowledge of these sins.* "I know your" sins. You may try to conceal them, darkness and dissimulation may hide them from the gaze of men: but I know them. Nothing can be hidden from the eye of the great Judge. He knows though he does not avenge. We should not flatter ourselves that God sees not and will not punish our sins. All things shall one day be made manifest. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known."

Ver. 13. This may be applied to abstinence from speaking in three ways. 1. From *reviling.* When injury is inflicted the natural impulse is to return it. Other weapons failing, the tongue is always ready. It must be restrained if we would be disciples of Christ. Vindictive words are absolutely forbidden. 2. From *reproof.* It is indeed an evil time with the sinner when reproof is not to be used (Hos. iv. 17; Ezek. iii. 26). 3. From *explanation.* The best course is to commit our cause to God. The devil, who in an evil time forges the accusations which are often made against the people of God, can suborn the witnesses too [*Ryan*].

HOMILETICS.

Seeking Good and Enjoying God.—*Verses* 14, 15.

These words supplement the previous paragraph, in which Israel were exhorted to renounce idolatry, an offence to God, a crime against man. Now the order is reversed. Good must be sought and evil avoided, that mercy may yet be shown to a remnant of the people.

I. **The course recommended.** "Seek good and not evil." The negative and positive side of human duty. 1. *Seek the good.* Good is needful, and all men seek it. "Who will show us any good?" The soul is formed to know and love the good. As the plant turns towards the sun, so the soul seeks for good. But men seek in the wrong direction. They seek gratification in earthly things, and exclude God from their pursuits. They have a desire for him, a capacity to enjoy him, but move not in the direction to him. Seeking good is defined as *loving* the good. The right affection must be cherished. Depraved appetites and vitiated tastes must be renewed. A change of disposition is necessary to reformation of life. "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." 2. *Hate the evil.* Aversion is needful as well as affection. We have something to hate and something to love. Our sympathies and antipathies are not at variance, they differ in intensity, gain power according to their objects, and greatly influence our conduct. We evince the soundness of conversion by loathing and forsaking what God hates. We cannot love God without hating evil. The fear of the Lord is seen by departing from evil. "Positive virtue," says one, "promotes negative virtue." "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." 3. *Practise justice.* "Establish judgment in the gate." Israel must raise up and firmly support what they had thrown down. In their courts of law and in common practice they must be truthful. Neither bribe nor self-interest should divert men from judgment. The penitent will be just to man. In words and deeds he will give to all their due. Profession without principle is an insult to God. "What a man is in private duties, that he is in the sight of God, and no more," says Dr Owen. We cannot serve God, unless we are right with men. "Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well."

"Be what thou seemest, live thy creed,
Hold up to earth the torch Divine,

Be what thou prayest to be made,
Let thy great Master's steps be thine."

II. The benefits of adopting this course. Self-interest is not always the right motive to urge; but the benefits of serving God are manifold. 1. *Human life is preserved.* "Ye shall live." Calamity would take away their life, but deliverance would preserve it. In general, sin by its own nature and by the judgments of God upon it brings men to an untimely end. The wicked do not live out half their days. Worldliness wears out the spring; but piety contributes to the length and enjoyments of life. Religion promotes temperance and self-control. It redeems body and soul from morbid excitement and moral disease. "Righteousness tendeth to life." 2. *God's grace is received.* "The Lord God of Hosts will be gracious," &c. The sinner is not only delivered from present danger, but blessed with grace to live a holy life. God's grace is infinite and free. Former displeasures will not hinder him from bestowing it upon those who seek it. Penitent nations and feeble churches may hope for his returning favour. "God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." 3. *God's presence is enjoyed.* He "shall be with you as ye have spoken." Israel boasted of being God's people, and desired God to be with them in sin. But the "righteous Lord" cannot dwell with an unrighteous people. It is a delusion to talk of God if we do not seek him, to expect his presence when we do not walk in his commands. "If ye were Abraham's seed ye would do the works of Abraham." It is only when we repent and return to God that we enjoy his favour. God is always present to protect in the way of duty, as "the God of Hosts." "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 15. *It may be. I. If so, for what reasons?* 1. Men do not deserve deliverance. "The expression '*perhaps* he will show favour' indicates that the measure of Israel's sins was full, and no deliverance could be hoped for if God were to proceed to act according to his righteousness" [*Keil*]. 2. God in sovereign mercy has promised it. This is not the language of uncertainty. The difficulty is not with God, but with man. "Except ye repent," &c. *II. If so, on what conditions?* Negatively and positively stated. 1. Not by presuming on outward relation to God. God must be sought and found. 2. By pursuing right. (*a*) Right towards God. "Hate the evil and love the good." (*b*) Right towards man. "Establish judgment." To these conditions the hope, though humiliating to carnal security, is attached: perhaps God will then be gracious to a *remnant* of Joseph.

The verse sets forth—The relation between the negative and positive duties of life; or—1. The nature of true penitence—seeking God. 2. The evidence of true penitence—hating evil. 3. The reward of true penitence—God's protection and favour in life; or, 1. God the object sought. 2. Evil the difficulty in the way. 3. Divine favour and blessings the motive to urge the pursuit.

"God gives encouragement to such as sincerely seek him; yet he would not have them *absolutely* expect deliverance in temporal judgments, when provocations are come to a height: and he seeth it meet to exercise them with uncertainties that they may be yet more diligent, and prove their real piety by submission in those things" [*Hutcheson*].

"Temporal promises are made with an, *It may be:* and our prayers must be made accordingly."

HOMILETICS.

The Day of The Lord.—*Verses* 16—20.

Ver. 16. "*Therefore.*" God foreseeing that they will not forsake sin continues the threatening (ver. 13). Israel misapplied the words of Joel (ii. 31; iii. 4), thought that the day of the Lord would be deliverance to them and destruction to their enemies. The prophet warns them of false security. In blind infatuation they long for its approach, but it would be a day of unmitigated evil.

I. The day of the Lord described. A day of universal darkness and distress. The judgments were extensive as the manifold guilt. 1. *A day of Divine displeasure.* God would be with them not in the way they expected and boasted; in judgment, not mercy. "I will pass through thee." There would be a repetition of the events in Egypt. He would not pass *over* them in forgiving love, as the angel passed by the blood-stained doors; but *through* them in punishment severe and exact. Some as stubble or wood are ripe for Divine judgments (Nah. i. 10; Jas. iii. 5). God may have passed by them, but soon will pass through them. Nations may escape at one time and fearfully suffer at another. "For there was not a house where there was not one dead" (Ex. xii. 12, 30). 2. *A day of universal mourning.* "Wailing shall be in all the streets." (*a*) Mourning *in all places.* In the *streets* of the city, the *vineyards* of the fields, and the *highways* of the country; in centres of business and scenes of joy, would be lamentation and wailing. The hum of men and the mirth of children were turned into grief. There was "a vintage not of wine, but of woe." God's displeasure turns joy into mourning and robes all things with darkness and death. (*b*) Mourning *by all persons.* "The *skilful*," the professionals of lamentation, and the real mourners, the *husbandmen* called from the country, blended their cries together. Alas! Alas! The punishment was unequalled and the grief beyond expression. Sorrow will find all that are guilty, and none can escape. "Take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters. For a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion, How are we spoiled!" 3. *A day of darkness without light* (vers. 18—20). Calamities darken the brightest day. The day of present trouble is often without light. But no day so gloomy to impenitent sinners as the day of judgment. The word of God and the voice of conscience darken the prospects of the wicked. Unless they flee to Christ the future will be "even very dark, and no brightness in it." 4. *A day of calamity without escape.* Two comparisons illustrate this. (*a*) No escape *by flight.* To flee from the lion would only be to meet a bear. To escape from one danger was only to fall into another (cf. Jer. xlviii. 44; Is. xxiv. 18). "He shall flee from the iron weapon, and the bow of steel shall strike him through." (*b*) No escape *by shelter.* If a man rushed into a house and leaned in confidence upon the wall a serpent would bite him. Men often meet with destruction where they expect safety. "Evil shall hunt the wicked man to overthrow him." If men escape present they cannot the future judgment. It is vain to expect mercy at that day if we despise it now. Come to God instead of fleeing from him. "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?" **II. The day of the Lord threatened.** "The Lord saith thus"—1. *Though long delayed it will come.* To prove his love and give time for repentance God delays his promise. But he is not slack and forgetful. Threatening may not suddenly be executed, for "he is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish." Remember the nature of God and his determination to punish. "Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." 2. *Though apparently far off it will come.* All things continue as they were, but may unexpectedly change. The flood interrupted the order of nature. If we realize the past, it will help us to believe the future. "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." 3. *Though ridiculed by ungodly men it will come.* "Scoffers walking

after their own lusts" cry, "Where is the promise of his coming?" Join not their ranks. Heed not their ridicule. The promise is uttered and cannot be retracted. The coming is gradual, certain, and will soon be felt. Atheists should beware and presumptuous sinners should fear. The primeval world has changed, the deluge of Noah swept the earth, and a terrible day awaits impenitent sinners. "A little while, and he that shall come will come and will not tarry." III. The day of the Lord desired. "You that desire the day of the Lord." Their previous history would lead them to desire this time, and their subsequent life proved the spirit in which they did so. 1. *The day may be desired in a wrong spirit.* Israel applied the glowing descriptions of future times in a carnal sense. They expected a temporal Messiah, and knew neither their own character nor the nature of the day coming. They were not prepared for it, and what should have been a blessing turned out to be a woe to the nation. "Darkness and not light." Men desire the day—(*a*) In a *spirit of contempt.* The Israelites sarcastically might wish for the day (Is. v. 19; Jer. xvii. 15). Who cares for the day? let it come. (*b*) In a *spirit of delusion.* They desired some change, and thought the next would be for the better. The prophet seeks to undeceive them. Self-deluded sinners will find out their mistake at last. (*c*) In a *spirit of folly.* "To what end is it for you?" What will it profit you? Are you ready for it? Many would be glad to leave this world who are not fit for the next. They have but little reason to desire what will be darkness and not light to them. 2. *The day may be desired in a right spirit.* Some are ready for the day, delighting themselves in God and his service. They are preparing for death and waiting for the coming of Christ. In the common events and mysterious providences of life they pray not in scorn, "Let him make speed and hasten his work that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it." *Woe* to him who desires when he should dread the day of the Lord! "*Blessed* is that servant" who is ready and waiting, "and whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing."

Death not always Desirable.—*Verse* 18.

We may apply this to the day of death. Often in trouble and disappointment men express a wish that God would take away their life, supposing that it is better for them to die than to live. We cannot be sure of the sincerity of their desire; and they may not be sure of it themselves. Under the pressure of present feeling, they imagine death would be welcome, and perhaps if it actually came they would decline its aid. If they *would* not they *ought.* For *their* fleeing from trouble is as if a man did flee from a lion and a bear met him, &c. Let me beg these sons of sorrow to inquire—Whether the event they long for will be a *real remedy* for their complaints. Are they sure that death will be annihilation? perfectly sure that there is nothing beyond the grave? Can they prove that there is no future? or that in this state there is only happiness and no misery? Judas hanged himself, went to his own place, which was worse than his former condition, with all the horrors of its remorse. If Scripture be true *all* are not happy at death; *none* are then happy without a title to heaven and a meetness for it. Have *you* this title? this meetness? Do you love holiness? Without this could you be happy in a holy place? in a holy state? in holy employments, &c.? Is the Redeemer precious to your souls? Nothing can make us happy but what relieves our *wants,* fulfils our *desires,* and satisfies our *hope.* Without holiness *no* man can see the Lord.

How *absurd,* then, to wish to leave this world for another, before you are sure the exchange will be for your advantage. For advantage it cannot be if you die unpardoned and unrenewed. Blessed are the dead that die *in the Lord.* Out of him, out of refuge, and the avenger of blood is upon you. Out of him, you are out of the Ark and exposed to the Deluge. The day of *your* death is not better than

the day of your birth. Your privations and distresses here are only the beginnings of sorrow, a drop to the ocean compared with hell. And once gone from time, no return. Therefore instead of wishing this important period *ended*, be thankful that it is prolonged, even in a vale of tears; account that the long-suffering of God is your salvation, for he is not willing that any should perish.

Remember also that disappointment and sorrow, which make you impatient, may prove the greatest blessing; the valley of Achor a door of hope. God does not afflict willingly. He renders earth desolate to induce you to seek a better country. Away, then, with every thought of desperation. Arise and go unto your Father, waiting to receive graciously and love freely. If tempted to despair, cry, "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." "Come unto me, *all* ye that labour," &c. The Athenian said, "I should have been lost, if I had not been lost." In affliction Manasseh found his father's God. We often pity those who have seen *better* days. But if they forgot God in prosperity, and in their adversity have thrown themselves into his arms—these are the *best* days they ever saw. This will be your case, suffering friend, if you seek God and commit your cause to him. He will turn the shadow of death into the morning, and you shall join the multitude who say—*It is good for me that I have been afflicted* [*Jay*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 16. It costs men nothing to own God as a Creator, the Cause of causes, the Orderer of all things by certain fixed laws. It satisfies certain intellects so to own him. What man, a sinner, shrinks from, is that God is Lord, the absolute disposer and master of his sinful self [*Pusey*].

Woe, woe, going up from every street of a metropolis, in one unmitigated, unchanging, ever-repeated monotony of grief. Such were the present fruits of sin. Yet what a mere shadow of the inward grief is its outward utterance [*Ib.*].

Ver. 17. If there were joy in any place it would be in the vineyards; vineyards are places of mirth and refreshing, grapes make the wine, which makes glad the heart of man. Therefore when he threatens, that in *all vineyards there shall be wailing*, it is as much as if he said, There shall be sorrow in those places where usually the greatest joy is found, or there shall be sorrow in every place. Joy shall dislodge and give place to sorrow, *for I will pass through thee, saith the Lord* [*Caryl*].

Vers. 17, 18. I. The certainty of the day. "Saith the Lord." II. The method of its approach. "I will pass through." III. The consequences of its arrival. "Darkness and not light."

Ver. 18. *To what end is it for you?* Self-examination would teach — that they would *gain* nothing in the day—that it should be *delayed*, rather than *desired*, if not prepared for it—that the evil spirit in which it is longed for should be eradicated, and that men should seriously consider their ways and submit to God.

Ver. 19. The path of light would prove a path of increased danger—the place of confidence, expected shelter and repose, would become the place of pain and wounding unto death [*Ryan*]. From both lion and bear there might be escape by flight. When the man had *leaned his hand* trustfully *on the wall* of his own house, *and the serpent bit him*, there was no escape. He had fled from death to death, from peril to destruction [*Pusey*].

Ver. 20. *Shall not?* He appeals to their own consciences, "Is it not so, as I have said?" Men's consciences are truer than their intellects. However they may employ the subtlety of their intellect to dull their conscience, they feel, in their heart of hearts, that there is a Judge, that guilt is punished, that they are guilty. The soul is a witness to its own deathlessness, its own accountableness, and its own punishableness [*Pusey*].

The godly will have some light in trouble (though temptation hide it from

them, Is. l. 10), and may sometimes attain to some measure of allowance (Ps. cxii. 4); and may certainly expect that there will be a clear and comfortable issue from their troubles (Mic. vii. 8); yet it is terrible to think how dreadful a day of vengeance will be to the wicked, how grieving and perplexing their miseries will be, and how destitute of present comfort and future hope they are [*Hutcheson*].

HOMILETICS.

The Ritual without the Moral.—*Verses* 21—23.

The judgments threatened will not be averted by feasts and sacrifices. God expresses his abhorrence to mere ceremonial observances, and will not accept heartless worship. "I hate, I despise," &c. Notice—

I. **Religious assemblies without true worship.** Israel had *feast days*, to abstain from servile work and rejoice in God; *solemn assemblies*, to worship God and put themselves under some restraint. But in these things they followed their own device, or imitated the worship at Jerusalem; substituted human inventions for Divine institutions; "*your* feast days," not mine; and thus prefigured many more who call themselves Christians. Men uphold the means of grace, attend the worship of God, but the name of God they will not adore. They defend religion, appoint ordinances, and put formal for spiritual service. They pervert the times and the places in which they should meet God. Solemn assemblies, social and private prayer, may prove a curse and not a blessing. Outward worship and superior privileges may increase our condemnation, and cause rejection in the sight of God. "I despise your feast days." II. **Daily sacrifices without true obedience.** They offered *burnt-offerings*, tokens of self-sacrifice; *peace-offerings*, signs of gratitude, from *fat beasts*, the best they could get; but they were not regarded. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" 1. *Their ritual was external.* The grandeur of the gift is nothing without the heart of the giver. Costly offerings are of no value without love. God hates dissembled worship. It is double iniquity. "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination; how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?" 2. *Their conduct was immoral.* They despised the poor and neglected judgment; cherished uncharitable feelings, and had no desire to do right. Love to God must be seen in right conduct towards men; true worship, in pure morality; and faith, in good works. God smells not the savour of splendid rituals without consistent lives (Lev. xxvi. 31). He may accept the moral without the ritual, but never the ritual without the moral. "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice." III. **Instrumental music without true melody.** It was *noise*, not melody; pleasing to man, but distasteful to God. Church-music is often mere display—intoned with energy, and ending in self. Music is the expression of emotion, the outburst of praise to God. When rightly conducted it will be attractive to man and honouring to God. In times of revival it has elevated the heart and quickened the life. But the best gifts of nature and art may be made instruments of evil. Music is abused when joined with immoral poetry and allurements of sin. When grace is not in the heart we do not sing with the spirit and with the understanding. If the life is not in tune with the lips, God says, "Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 21, 22. Israel had *feasts* of solemn joy and the restraint of *solemn assemblies*. They offered *whole burnt-offerings*, the token of self-sacrifice, in which the sacrificer retained nothing to himself, but gave them freely to God. They offered also *peace-offerings*, as tokens of the willing thankfulness of souls at peace with God. What they offered was the best of its kind, *fatted beasts*. Hymns of praise, full-toned chorus, instrumental music! What was wanting, Israel thought, to secure them the favour of God? Love and obedience. *If ye love me, keep my commandments*. And so those things, whereby they hoped to propitiate God, were the object of his displeasure [*Pusey*]. Here is a warning to all who think to please God by elaborate musical services in his house; while they do not take heed to worship him with their hearts, and to obey him in their daily life [*Wordsworth*].

Ver. 24. The sound of music, rolling in full chorus, will not profit in a drought of justice and righteousness. "Praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner, for it was not sent him of the Lord" (Ecclus. xv. 9).

When justice is duly administered it is said to *run down as waters*, &c. Now waters and streams run not to one man's house, or door, but the stream offers itself to every man, it runs down to the poor man's door as well as to the rich man's door, it runs by the meanest cottage as well as by the princely palace. Righteousness must run like a stream; it must be a common, a universal good [*Caryl*].

The first outward step in conversion is to break off sin. He bids them *let judgment*, which had hitherto been perverted in its course, *roll on* like a mighty tide of *waters*, sweeping before it all hindrances, obstructed by no power, turned aside by no bribery, but pouring on in one perpetual flow, reaching all, refreshing all, and righteousness *like a mighty* (or ceaseless) *stream*. True righteousness is not fitful, like an intermitting stream, vehement at one time, then disappearing, but continuous, unfailing [*Pusey*].

HOMILETICS.

JUDGMENTS LIKE A FLOOD.—*Verse* 24.

The verse is to be explained according to Is. x. 22, and threatens the flooding of the land with judgment, and the punitive righteousness of God [*Keil*]. In this sense the judgments of God are like a flood.

I. In the method of coming. Terrors and troubles are often compared to waters in Scripture. 1. *They come suddenly*. All at once they burst upon men in sin and carnal security. When they say *peace* then sudden destruction cometh upon them. 2. *They come supernaturally*. God, and not any second cause, sends them. "God hath broken in upon mine enemies . . . like the breaking forth of waters." 3. *They come violently*. They carry away all opposition, and roll direct to their place. 4. *They come abundantly*. One after another in dreadful succession upon individuals and nations, until the purpose of God is accomplished. II. In the mischief they create. Floods and mighty streams are fearful in themselves, but when sent by Almighty power to chastise who can resist them? 1. *They create consternation*. Men are terrified and seek every possible way of escape. The late floods in England and France illustrate this. Divine judgments are intended to rouse men from slumber and lead them to God. "For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." 2. *They cause universal devastation*. They sweep the city and the country, and spread destruction on every hand. The mansions of the rich and the dwellings of the poor are overcome with the rolling stream. So God's fierce anger goes over men

as mighty waters, to drown their possessions and take their comforts. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me."

"Wide o'er misfortune's surging tide
Billows succeeding billows spread;
Should one, its fury spent, subside,
Another lifts its boisterous head."

HEREDITARY SINS AND GRIEVOUS PUNISHMENT.—*Verses* 25—27.

Hereditary sin was the second reason why the day of the Lord would be to them a day of distress. From the earliest period their hearts had been alienated. As heirs to the guilt and imitators of the ways of their fathers, they must be carried into a far country. Continued provocation will bring greater punishment than ever.

I. The same system of idolatry was practised. If we carefully compare the text with Deut. xxxii. 17, Josh. xxiv. 14, and Ezek. xx. 26, we find that Israel were guilty of idolatry in the wilderness. 1. *They misrepresented the true God.* They made images for themselves in direct opposition to God's command. In the very tabernacle of Jehovah they bore the shrines of Moloch and Remphan Amos declared the men of his day to be addicted to the same sins and identified with the same disgrace. Some men inherit the lusts as well as the lands of their ancestors. The idolatry of the fathers is seen in the worship of the sons. Thus we forfeit the distinction which God gives and entail one of our own. "I will cause you to go into captivity." 2. *They worshipped false gods.* "Have ye offered unto *me?*" Here lies the emphasis. Notwithstanding all their pretensions and sacrifices they offered not to God. "They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods, whom your fathers feared not." We are not safe because we have a Protestant Bible and orthodox creeds, abundant churches, and religious privileges. The same tendency is in our hearts to forget the revealed character and despise the claims of God — to create and honour other gods, and amid constraining reasons for cleaving to God, make images of things in heaven above or in earth beneath. "Their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant." **II. The same perverse spirit was cherished.** Stephen quotes this charge against the people, as a signal proof of perverseness of heart which had always been shown by the nation. Even in days of wonderful deliverance and multiplied acts of Divine favour they cherished a rebellious heart. Men are found now resisting the Holy Spirit as their fathers from generations before them have done. They partake of the sins of their progenitors. 1. *In copying their example;* 2. *In commending their errors;* and 3. *In cherishing their spirit.* Thus we may identify ourselves with sins which we do not really commit. "Neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." **III. The same kind of punishment was inflicted.** If we partake of other men's guilt we are liable to the same punishment. Israel suffered in a similar way to those in ancient days. 1. *They fell under severe displeasure.* Murmuring and rebellion brought upon a former race the judgments of God. Their carcases fell in the wilderness, a warning to all generations of idolatry and unbelief. 2. *They were excluded from the land of promise.* One race did not enter Canaan; the other was driven out of it into exile. Instead of warding off the curse, they secured its reversion. The day came when they presumptuously desired and brought darkness, not light; judgment, not deliverance. They were carried "beyond Damascus," beyond all hope of return (2 Kings xvii. 6). Learn—1. That God gives a record and warning from the punishment of men's sins. 2. That he who commits and cherishes a sin, puts himself in the company of those who have been guilty of it from the beginning of the world. 3. That it is a principle with God to punish more severely, if less judgment do not work the end for which

they are sent. 4. If men would seriously meditate upon God's greatness and power, they would not sleep securely under his awful threatenings. Thus "saith the Lord, whose name is the God of Hosts."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER V.

Vers. 1—3. In a piteous lamentation of the miserable state of the Church of Christ in England in the reign of Queen Mary, written by that worthy martyr of God Nicholas Ridley (Works, Parker Society), we meet with most affecting reasons for sorrow and tears [*Ryan*].

"If you have tears, prepare to shed them now."
[*Shakespeare.*]

Vers. 4—6. Jeroboam pretended that it was too much for Israel to go up to Jerusalem. Yet Israel thought it not too much to go to the extremest point of Judah towards Idumæa, perhaps four times as far south of Jerusalem as Jerusalem lay from Bethel. For Beersheba is thought to have lain some 30 miles south of Hebron, which is 22 miles south of Jerusalem; while Bethel is but 12 to the north. So much pains will men take in self-willed service, and yet not see that it takes away the excuse for neglecting the true [*Pusey*].

Ver. 6. "Justice is the great but simple principle, and the whole secret of success in all government. It is as essential in the training of an infant as in the government of a mighty nation."

"Justice, like lightning, ever should appear
To few men's ruin, but to all men's fear."
[*Sivenam.*]

Vers. 8, 9. Power is that glorious attribute of God Almighty which furnishes the rest of his perfections: 'Twas power which made his ideas fruitful, and struck the world out of his thoughts. 'Tis this which is the basis of all things; which constitutes the vigour of second causes, and keeps the sun and moon in repair. Omniscience and goodness, without a corresponding power, would be strangely short of satisfaction; to know everything without being able to supply defects and remedy disorders, must be a grievance; but when omnipotence comes into the nation the grandeur is perfect [*Jer. Collier*].

Vers. 9—11.

"It often falls, in course of common life,
That right sometimes is overborne of wrong,
The avarice of power, or guile, or strife,
That weakens her and makes her party strong.
But Justice, though her doom she do prolong,
Yet at the last will make her own cause right."
[*Spenser.*]

Ver. 10. Who is there that sometimes does not merit a check? and yet how few will endure one [*Feltham*].

Ver. 11. "*Built houses*," *&c.*

"You take my house when you do take the prop
That doth sustain my house; you take my life
When you do take the means whereby I live."
[*Shakespeare.*]

Ver. 13. *Keep silence.* Euler lived at Petersburg during the administration of Biron, one of the most tyrannical ministers that ever breathed. On the philosopher's coming to Berlin, after the tyrant's death, the late queen of Prussia, who could hardly get a word out of him, asked him the reason of his silence. "Because," said he, "I come from a place where if a man says a word he is hanged" [*Whitecross*].

Vers. 14, 15. We must not envy the doers of evil, but depart from their spirit and example. As Lot left Sodom without casting a look behind, so must we leave sin. No time or parley is to be held with sin, we must turn away from it without hesitation, and set ourselves practically to work in the opposite direction [*Spurgeon*].

Vers. 16—20. Ill-gotten gains are a dangerous and uncertain possession. God can easily take them away, and turn our joy into mourning. "That which is dyed with many dippings is in the grain, and can very hardly be washed out" [*Jer. Taylor*]. Men do not love to be brought into contact with realities, or be reminded of coming "days of darkness." There is an unwelcome message to the conscience, Art thou ready to meet this solemn—this hastening season? If you regard

death as a friend, prepare to entertain it; if an enemy, prepare to overcome it.

Vers. 21—23. A man is not what he saith, but what he doeth. To say what we do, and not to do what we say, is but to undo ourselves by doing [*Dyer*]. Hypocrisy is filling up some radical defect with some shallowy pretence [*Binney*].

"'Tis mad idolatry
To make the service greater than the God."
[*Shakespeare.*]

Vers. 25—27. The fact that physical, mental, and moral qualities are hereditary, is proved in the persistent characteristics of races and nations. Jewish and negro types, Chinese and Japanese, have had the same characteristics for centuries. So features of morality are stamped upon descendants. By walking in the steps of their fathers, nations and families reap the same harvest. We have hereditary transmission of sins and punishment.

CHAPTER VI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Second woe denounced. Ease**] Recklessly and carelessly. **Mount.**] not in God. **Sam.**] Strong, which resisted for 3 years, and was the last city of Israel taken (2 Kings xvii. 5, 6). **Chief**] in influence and office, Heb. men designated (Num. i. 17: 1 Chron. xii. 31). **Came**] for decision and help. Israel was the chief of nations, and these princes the distinguished of Israel. Sadly degenerate now! **2. Pass**] Survey three neighbouring kingdoms. "If these kingdoms are not *better* and *greater* than yours, why do ye worship *their* gods and forsake the *true* God?" [*Elzas*]. **3. Woe**] Charge first from a general and then a special view. **Put off**] Lit. with aversion, the day of retribution, though declared near (Ezek. xii. 21—28). **Bring near**] Suffer oppression to be enthroned among you. **4.**] Luxury added to oppression. **Stretch**] Lit. pour themselves out, "dissolved, unnerved, in luxury and sloth." **Beds**] inlaid with ivory. **Lambs**] Choice and delicious in the East. **5.**] Like David they employ themselves with music, but for a different aim. **6.**] Not satisfied with small cups, they took the *bowls* used for sprinkling of blood, to indulge in excess, and used the most costly oils, not for health and cleanliness, but wanton luxury. **Grieved**] not for calamities suffered in the past, or threatened in future. **7. Head**] Chiefs in transgression must be *first* in the procession to captivity. **Banquet**] Lit. making merry with shouts. **8. Sworn**] "Like ch. iv. 2, except that it is by *himself* instead of by *his holiness*, but the sense is the same, for the *nephesh* of Jehovah, *i. e.* his inmost self or being, is his holiness" [*Keil*]. **9. Ten**] A rare case (ch. v. 3). **10. Uncle**] Any relative who had to bury the dead (Gen. xxv. 9: Judg. xvi. 31). **Burn.**] in case of necessity. **Bones**] *i. e.* the dead body (Gen. l. 25: Ex. xiii. 19). **Say**] Ask one discovered if he is the only survivor. **Hold**] The burier bids the survivor be silent, lest by invocation God should make him a victim of death. All hope from God has utterly gone. **11.**] **Smite**] by earthquake, or by pestilence and sword during siege; every house, great and small. **12.**] As horses and oxen are useless on a rock, so ye are incapable of fulfilling justice [*Grotius*]. The comparison indicates the folly of expecting prosperity while committing acts of injustice. The interrogative form gives strength to the representation. **13. Nought**] Their growing empire, or imaginary strength. **Horns**] A symbol of power; dominion rescued by Jeroboam from the Syrians (2 Kings xiv. 25). **14.**] God's answer to this presumption. **A people**] Not named, perhaps to awaken attention; probably Assyria. **Afflict**] Oppress, crush down; the whole extent of territory said to have been recovered by Jeroboam II., the region of triumphs a scene of woe.

HOMILETICS.

AT EASE IN ZION.—*Verse* 1.

In the first part of this chapter woe is uttered against the careless chiefs of the nation, for profane security, contempt of Divine judgments, and heartless oppression. Special allusion is made to the leaders, but the whole nation had sunk into godless conduct and shameful debauchery.

I. At ease in eminent responsibility. "At ease in Zion." Israel was exalted as a nation above others. Israel's princes were men of rank and authority; "renowned of the congregation," and consulted by the people. All were blessed with eminent privileges and great responsibility. But the honour was not recognized. The highest motive to action did not confirm them in fidelity to God. They carelessly indulged themselves and forgot their responsibilities. Where much is given, much will be required. To be "at ease in Zion," in the midst of religious ordinances and gospel light, is especial danger. If we neglect or despise our eminent position, we aggravate our guilt, and increase the greatness of our downfall—"Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida!" &c. **II. At ease in carnal security.** "And trust in the mountain of Samaria." Zion, the centre of religion, and Samaria, the metropolis of a powerful kingdom, were the security of Israel. Our own strength and resources will prove a broken reed. Men may boast of the places in which they live, glory in their eminence, and secure themselves in ease; but vain confidence in the means of grace will awfully disappoint. We must trust to no great men, no high hills. "Our help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth." **III. At ease in great pride.** Connected with ease and carnal security was a haughty spirit. Israel prided themselves in their relation to God, and disdained other nations. "The chief of the nations to whom the house of Israel came" would think themselves, and expect others to call them, great men. "Haughty because of my holy mountain." Many are puffed up with pride, and rock themselves to sleep in religious privileges. They cry "The temple of the Lord are we" (Jer. vii. 4), and doubt not but God's sanctuary will secure them from judgments to come. But pride never gives true rest, and those who delude themselves in superior holiness and distinguished titles shall be utterly forgotten (Ps. cix. 13). The greater their glory, the more shameful their punishment. "How much she hath glorified herself and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her." **IV. At ease in threatened judgments.** "Woe to them." When God is angry men have no reason to sleep. Reckless indifference, in business and religion, is a forerunner of certain ruin. Careless sinners, sleepers in Zion, are in danger of eternal destruction. When they rouse not at the call of the gospel, when deaf to the thunders of Divine judgments, they sleep where God will come first and be most severe; where the calls are loudest and the doom most hopeless. Wake up at the *sound* of "Woe," before you feel its dreadful reality. "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise and call upon thy God."

Scourge for Slumbering Souls.

In itself considered it is no ill thing, but a great blessing, to be at ease in Zion, in a healthy sense of the word. But there is an ill sense in which it is used, "Woe to them," &c: the ease of one grown callous, hardened, and sullen, a sleep which if not broken will bring to the bed of hell.

I. *First*, to rouse the many at ease in Zion, we will call out their names—which are found in the chapter before us. The name of the first sleeper in Zion is *Presumptuous*. His character is described in the first verse, "They trust in the mountain," &c.—boast of their morality and self-righteousness. "I am rich and increased in good," &c. A second is *Not-now*, or *Procrastination*. "Ye that put far away the evil day" (ver. 3). The third name is *Evil-doer*, or *Sin-lover*. "They cause the seat of violence to come near." The next is *Love-self*. "They lie upon beds of ivory," &c. Among those at ease was one called *Careless*, an individual who belongs to a large family. We may give him another name, *giddy, light-hearted*. "That chant to the sound of the viol." The last name is *Crossless*. "They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." II. Now having mentioned their names we shed some light upon these sleepers' eyes. A hopeless errand! for they sleep with the sun of heaven shining upon their eyelids. "At ease in *Zion*." Not in Ethiopia, where they have never heard the gospel; not in

Sheba or the ends of the earth, where no warning prophets had been sent. In the first place you are asleep, *but you know your danger*. You have *frequent arousings*. Everything in this place *cries out against you*. To be at ease when the House, the Gospel, and the Sabbath are crying out against us, is to be at ease while God is making ready his sword against us. **III.** The last point is, **to sound the trumpet in the ears of the sleepers.** My trumpet has but one note, "Woe! woe! woe!" Not a living man knows the full meaning of that word. Bring out the gentler parts of the note; and first, woe to you, *for now is it at all likely that you ever will be saved?* In the innumerable cases in this place of conversion the majority were persons who had not long heard the word. I think Christmas Evans used the simile of the blacksmith's dog, which was very frightened with the sparks at first, but at last got so accustomed to them that he went to sleep under the anvil. "And so," said the good preacher, "there be many that go to sleep under the gospel, with the sparks of damnation flying about their nostrils." Remember you are asleep in a place where Justice deals its heaviest blow. Do you tremble? You are saved the moment you believe in Christ. "There is therefore now no condemnation," &c. [*Spurgeon*].

Ingratitude for the Presence and Indifference to the Warnings of God.—*Verses* 2, 3.

To prove the ingratitude of the nation, Amos shows that Israel was not inferior to any heathen state in greatness and prosperity—that this honour involved serious responsibility, and that to despise the warnings of God who had *thus* blessed them would bring great punishment. **I. Ingratitude for God's presence.** Israel were ungrateful to God for the original gift and the continued preservation of the land. The heathens had suffered, they had been spared, yet they forgot God. 1. *In national prosperity.* "Pass ye," &c., look everywhere and see if any kingdom has a "*border greater* than your border." We boast of our rank and pre-eminence; talk of our colonies and dependencies, and exclaim, "Great and mighty England!" But empire is not greatness. The history of Gath and Hamath, of Greece and Rome, remind us that we stand by God's providence alone—that we fall when we rely on our own might and prosperity. If we trust to our insular position, our popular platform, and our natural resources, we forget the real and extract the wrong causes. 2. *In national morality.* We pride ourselves in national worth, and point to other nations, are "they *better* than these kingdoms?" Education and government, society and public sentiment, are intoned and controlled by the spirit of Christianity. But morally we are far from being what we ought. Boasting is excluded by non-recognition of God and prevalent evils. We are often extravagant and haughty. Vice and intemperance abound. Bacchus and Mammon have temples in every town, and votaries in every street. There are spots in our sun and dirt upon our pedestal. Let us not be unthankful to God, not forgetful of other nations. "Art thou better than populous No, that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about it, whose rampart was the sea," &c. (Nah. iii. 8, 9)? **II. Indifference to God's warning.** "You put away the evil day." As Israel despised the judgments, so men now put away the warnings of God's providence. The evil day frightens the ungodly, and in different ways they push it from them and assign it to a distance. 1. *In carelessness.* Sentence against sin is not executed speedily, and men grow indifferent. Space for escape is given, the long-suffering of God is seen, and they take liberties. Sin blinds the mind and hardens the heart Impressions wear away, proofs of judgments grow weaker, and sinners view things with inverted glance. Duty is delayed and death is put out of their minds.

"All men think all men mortal, but themselves."

2. *In unbelief.* Amid culture and science scepticism abounds, infidelity spreads, and warnings are unheeded. Indulgence in sin opens up avenues to unbelief. Led

to believe against all moral evidence, men speak as they feel, and make evil days small and distant. "Therefore do men take judgment to be far off from them," says one, "because they take sin to be near them." Truth looked at from a distance will gradually fade away, and lose its authority over life. It will be put farther and farther from us until it is denied altogether, and we sleep in false security. 3. *In contempt.* Israel neither feared nor believed approaching danger. In scorn they might tell the prophet it was delayed, and would therefore not come near them. Instead of preparing for it, they grew harder and more eager in sin. "They cause violence to come near." The farther they put away judgment the nearer they brought oppression. Under colour of justice and law the wicked fix up the throne of iniquity, disregard the voice of God, and hasten on that last destruction which they dream will never come. Death is but a step off, and "the Judge standeth before the door." Retribution follows judgment, and if retribution were only temporal and mutable that would be alarming. But it is eternal and irreversible. Are we prepared for the change? "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?"

A Reckless Community.—*Verses* 4—6.

Israel not only put away the day of Divine retribution, but multiplied the causes which produced it. Violence within will bring violence from without the land. When we put away God we invite destruction. Luxury, revelry, and debauchery describe a reckless community and reign in the present day. The special sins condemned are depicted in a peculiar manner.

I. Self-indulgence. Men betray their feelings and abuse their gifts, show they live like epicures, and pamper themselves like beasts. This selfish indulgence is seen—1. *In luxurious ease.* "That lie upon beds of ivory." Beds most expensive and scarce, splendid and far-fetched. They unnerved and relaxed themselves upon couches. They humoured themselves in idleness and wealth; indulged in personal gratification, abounded in superfluities, and robbed the poor of necessities. 2. *In effeminate diet.* The choicest lambs and calves fed out of the stall only satisfied their appetite. Some live to eat, and do not eat to live; feed without gratitude, and indulge in lust without restraint. "Whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame." **II. Profane revelry.** "That chant to the sound of the viol." They tried to lead a merry life and a happy one. They displayed ingenuity by inventing instruments to drive away dull care. As David improved and introduced musical instruments into the service of God, so these men devised and fitted them for luxury and sensuality. But artificial music creates no Divine harmony. It weakens the nature and ministers to the folly of men. When men sing instead of weeping, when mirth is unseasonable, unbridled, and licentious, it is void of everything that dignifies the mind and elevates the soul to God. "Admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord."

> "There's not a string attuned to mirth
> But has its chord in melancholy."

III. Shameful debauchery. Luxury and selfishness lead to excess; sensuality and mirth, to irreverence. This is seen—1. *In profane conduct.* They were not satisfied with ordinary vessels, but robbed the altars to "drink wine in bowls." In former times princes of Israel manifested zeal in consecrating silver bowls to God, now they drink in honour of idolatry. They profaned the vessels of the sanctuary, and devoted to selfish what should have been for sacred uses. 2. *In riotous excess.* They drank out of large, not small cups. This they did habitually without measure or stint. They spent their wealth in pleasure and dissipation; employed their ingenuity to discover new methods of self-gratification, and drank wine to silence conscience, banish reflection, and harden the heart. **IV. Sinful apathy.**

They had no concern whatever for the nation sinking into decay and suffering under the judgment of God. 1. *Their joy is unbridled.* Their extravagance is seen in "the chief ointments with which they anoint themselves," not for health and comfort, but wanton luxury. The custom of anointing was suspended in time of mourning (2 Sam. xiv. 2), but these neither grieve for themselves nor for the ruin of their country. 2. *Their indifference is stolid.* Bent on personal gratification of the most debasing kind, they were devoid of all patriotism and concern for the injury to the kingdom. "They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." They indulged in the heartless conduct of the sons of Jacob towards their brother, eating bread when Joseph was in the pit (Gen. xxxvii. 24). Wrath had broken "out like a fire in the house of Joseph" (ch. v. 6), but they were deaf to the warnings of God and the remonstrance of the poor. They spent their time in beds of indolence and ease; pampered their bodies with delicious viands; and delighted their souls in strains of music, excess of wine, and costly perfumes. Sensuality results in unnatural feeling for kindred and country; shuts out the sufferings of others, and leads to greater indulgence. "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us and we would not hear."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 5. *The use and abuse of music.* 1. Its use, when devoted to the worship of God and the welfare of men. Vocal and instrumental music may be of immense service in the culture of the heart and the training of the young. Our nature is adapted to harmony, and God has bestowed means for improvement.

"There is in souls a sympathy with sounds,
And as the mind is pitched the ear is pleased."

2. Its abuse when employed in the service of Satan and ministering to licentiousness and lust. How often found in midnight revels and scenes of intemperance! "Debased music is a mark of a nation's decay and promotes it," says one. The constitution of nations may be affected by changing national music. "Give me the making of the nation's ballads," said Lord Chatham, "and I care not who makes the laws." David consecrated lyre and harp to the service of God, now men gain reputation by comic songs and immodest dancing. "Bid lute and harp to awake to the glory of God."

Like David. Men abuse gifts of God by the examples of saints. They stumble in their infirmities, and copy their actions in a wrong spirit. David a great lover of music, and employed it in the praise of God. Imitators use it for carnal pleasure.

Ver. 6. True patriotism, grieving for Joseph. 1. A country is often deeply afflicted by inward calamities and outward dangers. 2. A lover of his country will grieve for its affliction. David and Jeremiah noble examples. 3. Selfish indulgence deprives men of sympathy with others, renders them ungrateful and unpatriotic. "How many dwell in ceiled houses, and sing to the sound of the harp, and feast on the richest dainties, and care nothing for the sorrows of Christ, and his Church, nay, rather rejoice in them!" (Rev. xi. 10) [*Wordsworth*].

"Breathes there a man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!" [*Scott.*]

HOMILETICS.

NATIONAL RETRIBUTION UPON SINFUL INDULGENCE.—*Verses* 7—11.

The punishment is now threatened. Their "mighty sins" would bring heavy retribution. Those pre-eminent in crime would be pre-eminent in captivity. The nation must suffer by pestilence and plague. The ruin will be universal, and religious privileges would not avert it.

I. National captivity. Those who live in luxury often lose their liberty, and the most dignified are reduced to servitude. 1. *Disgraceful captivity.* The chief in rank were chief in sin, and first to go into captivity. Their disgrace was most conspicuous. Those who delight only in the pleasures of sense shall be removed from them. Those who think themselves secure, and put the evil day from them, will find it nearer than they imagine. The banquets of luxury and wantonness will be removed, and men who give themselves to mirth when God calls them to mourn will not go unpunished in their sin (Is. xxii. 14). 2. *Mournful captivity.* The shouting of wine-bibbers would cease. Feasting would end in weeping, and desolation would spread throughout the land. Carnal ease and sinful excess often end in hopeless misery. **II. National rejection.** The cities and kingdom with all their wealth would be delivered into the hands of the enemy. 1. *National glory abhorred.* "I abhor the excellency of Jacob." The house of God, rightly valued and properly used, was their glory and defence. Their priesthood, temple, and religious privileges raised them above other nations. But these were polluted and despised. God was dishonoured by idolatry and provoked to anger. The strength of "the city" and splendour of the "palaces" availed not. The glory departed. When God abhors he will soon abandon. External services are mere mockery. When national glory rivals God, and men blessed with distinguished excellency take pleasure in things base and inferior, God will reject them. "Therefore will I deliver up the city, with all that is therein." 2. *Dreadful mortality abounded.* The inmates of some houses would be entirely swept away. "Ten men in one house shall die." Few if any domestics were left to bury the dead. The uncle or distant relatives must bury or burn them. God's arrows were so piercing, and his anger so fierce, that relatives and survivors were agreed to keep solemn silence under the rod. Pestilence overtook those who escaped the sword. Hopeless despair seized men. Cut off from God, there was no help in man. They had to submit to appointed doom. 3. *Universal destruction prevailed.* (1) Destruction of *the population.* "In the multitude of the people is the strength of the prince," and God Almighty cut off that strength. (2) Destruction of *the capital.* The city or chief cities of the kingdom would be destroyed. They would therefore be robbed of defence, open to danger, and become an object of pity and contempt. "Like a city that is broken down, and without walls." (3) Destruction *most terrible.* "He will smite the great house with breaches," &c. The mighty and the mean have sinned and must be punished. God will smite not some, but all families and societies. "Princes' palaces are not *above*, the poor man's cottage is not *beneath* the judgment of God." (4) Destruction *most certain.* "God hath *sworn* by himself" (ver. 7). Sensuality produces stupidity. God seeks to rouse men by an oath to end the controversy. "The Lord *commandeth*." We should see God's hand and purpose in great distress. He makes it effectual and irresistible. When nations are ripe for judgment foreign armies are only Divine instruments. How hopeless the condition of those who harden themselves under Divine chastisements, and whose ruin God has sworn to accomplish!

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Mark the gradation of consequences in the whole paragraph. First the chiefs are punished. Then the people, influenced by their example, are drawn into captivity. The present generation are carried off by death, appointed ordinances are taken away, and the rod of God smites families great and small. "The Lord hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown" (Nah. i. 14: Jer. xlvii. 6).

Ver. 10. What a sad condition when men tremble at the name of God! What an exhibition of power upon an evil conscience, when men flee from

instead of turning to God. Ten righteous men would have saved Sodom, but here all were destroyed.

He who has obstinately abused the intellectual powers given him by God to cavil against God's truth, will be forsaken by him at the last, and will not be able to utter his name [*Wordsworth*].

HOMILETICS.

A Hopeless People.—*Verses* 12—14.

These verses are rather abrupt, and generally taken to show how useless and impossible it is to reform the people. Their perversion of right and their indifference to threatening rendered punishment inevitable, and foolish confidence in their own power could not avert it.

I. Punishment was most inevitable. Two illustrations prove this. Their conduct was perilous and preposterous. Horses cannot run with safety, nor can oxen plough, upon rocks: so in their self-chosen way they will wound themselves and be disappointed. 1. *Former attempts to reform had failed.* God had sent judgment after judgment, prophet after prophet, but in vain. They had not broken up their fallow ground, but were hard and uncultivated as a rock. They hindered the work of God and acted most perversely. "Those who will not be tilled as fields shall be abandoned as rocks," says Calvin. 2. *Special sins were not forsaken.* "Ye have turned judgment into gall," &c. Power was still abused, oppression and injustice practised, and righteousness turned into hemlock. Men who pervert justice, and despise ordinances in hope of advantage, will neither preserve the nation nor escape punishment. They turn the hearts of men and the providence of God against themselves. It is as impossible for them to prosper as to reap a harvest from the rock. 3. *The judgments of God were disregarded.* They continued to *rejoice* in their idols and wealth; boasted of their own valour, and thought to defend themselves with their own strength. "Have we not taken to us horns?" *i. e.* acquired power and dominion. Premeditated injustice, wilful opposition to the word of God, will lead to judicial blindness and destruction. Those who exalt themselves in pride shall be abased. **II. Punishment was most destructive.** What they took for their greatest gain would be their greatest loss. 1. *Their own strength could not defend them.* It was "a thing of nought." There was no substance, no reality in it. Victory and dominion, courage and prosperity, are nonentities. Empire decays and riches flee away. God only is real and satisfying good. 2. *The whole country would be desolated.* Under Jeroboam II. they had recovered their lands, "from the entering in of Hamath," &c. (2 Kings xiv. 25). They were boasting of their success and securing themselves in their dominions. But the scene of their triumph would be the scene of their fall. When men give not God the glory of their possessions, in justice will he take them away. 3. *The whole people would be oppressed.* "They shall afflict you." Conquerors would take the riches in which they gloried, treat them with indignity and afflict them with shame. Neither Judah nor Israel would be spared. It is easier to turn the course of nature than to change God's law from rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked. When God commands it must be done, and the scourge will be prevalent as the evil.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

12. *Horses upon a rock*, &c. The course of the sinner—1. Most foolish. 2. Most dangerous. 3. Most useless. Horses stumble and wound themselves. No harvest is reaped from such ploughing. The course of sin, turning equity into poison, will grievously disappoint.

13. *Taken to us horns.* The language of arrogance and self-confidence. 1. Men apt to ascribe possessions to their

own efforts. They have done everything and God nothing. 2. To overvalue them in the enjoyment. How many things in which we trust are things of nought. 3. Hence, when we think more of the gifts than the Giver, we are taught our folly. To glory in anything, whatever it may promise, will delude. God will strip men of every false, that he may become their true glory.

14. *I will raise up.* No foe could ever invade us if the Lord did not raise him up. War therefore is not an accident, but a providential dispensation. Pharaoh, Hadad, Rezon, the Chaldees, are all expressly said to have been raised up by the Lord (Ex. ix. 16 : 1 Kings xi. 14, 23; Hab. i. 6) [*Lange*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1. *Ease.* This is carnal ease, a fleshly security ; it is not the confidence of a man who is pardoned, but the ease of a hardened wretch who has learned to despise the gibbet. It is not the calm of a soul at peace with God, but the ease of a madman, who because he has hidden his sin from his own eyes, thinks he has concealed it from God [*Spurgeon*].

Vers. 2, 3. He that is graceless in a day of grace will be speechless in a day of judgment [*Mead*].

"Heaven gives the needful, but neglected call.
What day, what hour, but knocks at human hearts,
To wake the soul to sense of future scenes."
[*Young.*]

Vers. 4—6. *Pleasure.* Would you judge of the lawfulness or unlawfulness of pleasures, take this rule :—Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things ; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself [*Southey*].

"In this fool's paradise he drank delight."
[*G. Crabbe.*]

Ver. 7. *Banquet.*

"So comes a reckoning when the banquet's o'er,
The dreadful reckoning, and men smile no more."
[*Guy.*]

Ver. 9. *Die.* How terrible the features of this plague ! The entire sweeping away of all the inmates of some houses. A solemn spectacle for others to witness, displaying the fierceness and power of God's anger. In the great plague of Marseilles, 1720, and in that of the village of Eyam, 1666, we have similar scenes. "In 1813," says one, "such was the violence with which the plague raged at Malta, such the certain destruction which attended the slightest contact with the infected, that at last every better feeling of the heart was extinguished in a desire of self-preservation, and nobody could be procured to perform the melancholy offices which make up the funeral train of sickness and death."

Ver. 11. *Great and small.*

"With equal pace impartial fate
Knocks at the *palace* as the *cottage* gate."
[*Horace.*]

Ver. 12. The blessings of just administration are emphatically set forth by terms used to describe the opposite. Injustice is gall and poison, bitterness and death. How should it commend to us the kingdom of Christ, that he is to reign in righteousness, to judge in equity [*Ryan*].

Ver. 13. *Nought.* The more I exaggerate these ideal joys, the more do I treasure up subjects of woe. Oh what vanity has God written upon all things under the sun ! Adored be the never failing mercy of God ! He has made my happiness to depend, not on the uncertain connections of this life, but upon his own most blessed self—*a portion that never faileth* [*Martyn*].

Ver. 14. *Captivity.* Sell not your liberty to gratify your luxury [*Matt. Henry*].

"There is a paradise that fears
No forfeiture, and of its fruit He sends
Large prelibations oft to saints below."
[*Cowper.*]

CHAPTER VII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Showed**] three visions in this ch. **Locusts (vers. 1—3) the first**; "all inward tuitions produced by the Spirit of God, which set forth the primitive judgments of God" [*Keil*]. **Begin.**] Time defined, as the springing up of a second crop, and this crop after the **king's mowings**. Some take Jehovah as King, the mowing the judgments executed upon Israel. The period is most unfavourable. One crop had been taken and the second threatened. But this danger averted by intercession. **2. Small**] Reduced in number and strength, poor in means and hope, unable to stand. Vers. 4—6—The devouring fire. **Contend**] with Israel by war, of which fire is a symbol (Ezek. xxxviii. 22); represented as drying up *waters* (many people, Rev. xvii. 15) and devouring on dry land (Is. ix. 1). **6. For this**] as well as threatenings of vision first. Vers. 7—9—The third vision. **Plumb.**] applied expressly to Israel. **Pass by**] *i. e.* forgive them any more (Prov. xix. 11; Mic. vii. 18). God's patience is exhausted. The prophet intercedes no more. **9. Places**] of idol-worship; the royal family and the monarchy to be overthrown. **10.**] The prophet opposed at Bethel on account of these predictions. **Conspired**] Heb. *banded*, implying that others joined. There is a charge of conspiracy and sedition; insinuates that Amos prophesies for bread (vers. 10, 11), and in pretended courtesy advises him to remove. Say nothing against the king, let **us alone** in our customs, or we will suppress you by force. **14. Said**] Indignantly repudiated the charge against himself. He was no scholar; as a herdsman he was content with a little, did not seek a mere livelihood, but as the messenger of God he spoke with dignity and authority. **17. Therefore**] in return for this opposition Amaziah must bear his own doom. **Wife**] will be violently taken by the enemy. **The city**] publicly and openly: she would be dishonoured at the storming of the city. **Land**] possessed or assigned to others. **Sons**] Children slain by the foe; he himself would die in exile among the heathen, and the whole nation would be carried away into captivity.

HOMILETICS.

THE SCOURGING LOCUSTS.—*Verses* 1—3

The second half of Amos begins with visions; not mere warnings, but solemn predictions, adapted to the moral condition of the people. The impenitence of Israel is confirmed, their doom is fixed, and the sentence is irrevocable.

I. The judgment prepared. "He formed grasshoppers." 1. *Divine in its origin.* God prepared the affliction. The prophet is most emphatic on this point. "Evil in the city" is from the Lord. "*He* maketh the day dark with night." But such is our stupidity and ignorance, that we have need continually to be told. We require sensible evidence to show God's hand in our lot. Affliction comes not from the dust, nor trouble from the ground (Job v. 6). 2. *Specific in its character.* Locusts are the creatures of God, and perfectly under his commands. Creatures magnificent and minute display his power and execute his design (Joel i. 4). 3. *Special in its design.* God *formed* grasshoppers. There was not only power in the act, wisdom in the shape, but purpose in the end for which they were sent. God is said to *frame evil* against a sinful people (Jer. xviii. 11). These creatures were prepared and specially sent to eat up the grass. In his moral government, Jehovah prepares instruments, specially forms judgments for the correction of his people. (1) On account of disobedience. (2) With a design to restore. "Therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty." **II. The judgment timed.** "In the beginning of the shooting," &c. It might have been sent earlier and been more severe. The *former* might have been devoured with the *latter* growth. There was mercy as well as fitness in the time of affliction. "To everything there is a season," a fixed time, and a determined purpose. "As exactly and exquisitely suited to your case and mine," writes one, "every instant, as if it had been appointed and contrived only for that single case and that single moment." Every dispensation is most fitly chosen. To common observers it may appear untimely, for men see not the judgments prepared. In Israel there might be signs of abund-

ant crops, and some who ridiculed the calamity threatened. Men watch the rising corn, but forget the blight that may blast the harvests. Business may flourish, youth may bloom in beauty and strength, but God may consume the fresh and verdant scene. The messengers may be *formed*, and only waiting the command of their Creator to destroy the fruit of hand and mind. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." **III. The judgment arrested.** "It shall not be, saith the Lord." 1. *By the intercession of the prophet.* 'Then said I, O Lord God, cease." The prophet saw God in "the affliction of Joseph," and, unlike his countrymen, was grieved and interceded with God. How few that are smitten are concerned in the judgments of God! Amos is a type in spirit and practice of all the godly who pray for their kindred and country in public calamity. Our best friends, our true patriots, are those who feel deeply and pray earnestly under Divine chastisement. "And Jehoahaz besought the Lord, and the Lord hearkened unto him: for he saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them." 2. *By the mercy of God.* "The Lord repented for this;" in mercy heard the prayer and warded off the danger. Whatever be the conduct of men in public distress God alone can take distress away. But if we confess our sins, humble ourselves in petition before him, he will be gracious. If we stand in the breach, the ruin shall not happen. Prayer has often preserved nations, averted judgments, and changed the course of events. God has not only formed calamities, but fitted a place for prayer. He repents of the evil and takes it away. "For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left."

God Contending with Fire.—*Verse* 4.

If we take this fire *literally* or *metaphorically* it indicates the anger of God against his people and the judgments which should consume them.

I. God's action against men. Man has challenged God, denied his authority and broken his law. Sin begets contention, creates a controversy between God and man (Hos. iv. 1). God enters into judgment with him; pleads by insignificant creatures and terrible calamities, and executes fierce anger upon all workers of iniquity. Famine, fire, and sword, devour rich and poor, money and health, and consume everything before them (Ezek. xxxviii. 22). "The Lord standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people. By fire and by sword will the Lord plead with all flesh" (Is. lxvi. 13, 16). **II. Men's obstinacy before God.** We do not law or contend with men until we have tried other means. War and law should be the last resource. Judgment is God's strange work. But when all means have failed to win a people, then he contends with them in severest measures. He will vindicate his cause and character. To strive against him is—1. Foolish, 2. Guilty, and 3. Vain. Terrible will be the consequence of resistance. "Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree. . . And all flesh shall see that I the Lord have kindled it: it shall not be quenched" (Ezek. xx. 47, 48).

The Measuring Plumbline.—*Verses* 7—9.

In this vision we have the third stage of Divine judgments; God, the builder of the nation, tests and finds it degenerate. He will no longer spare nor seek to reform it. Retribution is neither removed nor mitigated by prayer. The day of decision has come, and the kingdom, except a remnant, must be destroyed. In the vision we have the trial and the verdict.

I. The trial presented. "*Thus* he showed me." The judgment is pictured and then explained. 1. *The nation is Divinely tested.* "Behold, *I* will set a plumbline." God himself stands upon the wall, plumbline in hand, fixed in purpose and exact in procedure. He had built them up, blessed them with holy laws and good rulers, and formed them for his praise and glory. But they were

examined, found irregular, and judged fit to be pulled down. The hand which builds our families and estates can destroy them, if we deviate from rectitude. "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet." 2. *The nation universally tested.* "In the midst," in the very centre of the kingdom. *Inwardly* as distinguished from outward judgment; *wholly* as distinguished from any part. In its religious and civil capacity, in its priesthood and government, God measures a nation. Our worship and conduct are weighed in the balance and found wanting. He condemns in proportion to our guilt. "He shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness" (Is. xxxiv. 11). 3. *The nation justly condemned.* "I will not again pass by them." God had exercised great care and kindness towards Israel, had been their bulwark and salvation: but since neither mercy nor judgment will mend them he will forbear no longer. He built them up in mercy and will ruin them in justice. The works and ways of men are tested by the word and providence of God; if discovered unequal, bending to the right or left, if they can no more be set upright, they will be demolished. All sin is transgression of law. The clearer the law and the greater the grace of the lawgiver, the more severe the punishment of guilt. God is justified when he speaks and clear when he judges (Ps. li. 4). **II. The verdict given.** "The punishment is specified in its two chief effects—the overthrow of their idolatrous sanctuaries and the extinction of the dynasty of Jeroboam, which was in effect the overthrow of the kingdom. In other words, their whole polity, ecclesiastical and civil, was to be subverted." 1. *The destruction of the idolatrous sanctuaries.* The centre and sanctuaries of a nation are its life and worth. If these be rotten or diseased the people will be corrupt. The great names of Isaac and Israel could not protect the high places and temples of the land. The altars at Bethel, Dan, and Gilgal were to be laid waste. If men obey not Jehovah, but sacrifice on their own hills and altars, they must expect the overthrow of their high places. Specious imitations of godly progenitors in Christian worship will not justify, but hasten the punishment of idolatry. 2. *The extinction of the royal dynasty.* Jeroboam II. died in peace. "*The house* of Jeroboam" is threatened in its prosperity and splendour. The kings of Israel were idolaters and drew the people from God. The court exerted an evil influence upon the sanctuary and corrupted the people. Its guilt was the greater and its judgment more certain. Princes and people had sinned and must be punished together. The prediction of Samuel came to pass. "If ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king." 3. *The dissolution of the whole kingdom.* The destruction of the ruling family was the prelude to the ruin of the entire kingdom. The stroke fell upon the family of Jeroboam (2 Kings xv. 8—10); after that the kingdom decayed daily and speedily came to ruin. All kind of idolatry provokes God, destroys its votaries, and ruins the land in which it is practised (Ps. cvi. 29: Amos ii. 4, 5.)

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 8. *The vision* seen and explained. I. It is our duty to attend to what God has revealed. 1. It is worthy of attention—*Behold.* 2. We have need to be quickened in our attention, even when the message most concerns us and the people. *What seest thou?* II. In all our attention we have need of Divine aid to explain the revelation. We may see the vision, give an account of it, but cannot understand until God interprets it to our hearts and minds.

Ver. 7. *The plumbline.* 1. Applied to *the body*, which must be kept healthy and erect. It is the work of God, and should be the temple of the Holy Ghost. 2. Applied to *the soul*, which God made upright and should not fall into sin. 3. Applied to *the life*, which should be regulated by the law of God, the standard of right.

This is an emblem of God's mercy and justice, who is the Master-builder of the Church. 1. It denotes his

mercy, in that he made this Church right and firm like a perpendicular wall, made exactly by line and rule, he had curiously built it, and as carefully defended it. 2. It is an emblem of his *justice*. He stands upon the wall of his Church, continually trying and examining whether it continue right or not, bearing with its defects, until, like a wall quite bending and belching out, he resolves to throw down all (Is. xxx. 13) [*Hall*]. The wall of Israel had been *built* by God with a plumbline, and now it would be *destroyed* with a plumbline (cf. 2 Kings xxi. 13 : Is. xxxv. 2 : Lam. ii. 8) ; that is, there was, so to speak, an architectural design and plan in God's work of destroying Israel, no less than in his former favour to Israel in building him up. God does everything according to measure, number, and weight (Wisdom xi. 20). As one said of old, "The Deity is a perfect Geometrician," and the plumbline of destruction was to be co-extensive with the plumbline of construction—it was to be total [*Wordsworth*].

HOMILETICS.

The First Three Visions.—*Verses* 1—9.

These visions are closely related and mutually dependent one upon another. They may be classified under three heads. We shall compare them.

I. They are corrective in their design. God chastens whom he loves. Judgments and mercies are sent to discipline our hearts. Some have more judgments than mercies, and others more mercies than judgments. Both are mixed in life and regulated by infinite wisdom and human conduct. **II. They are graduated according to moral condition.** Progressive in their series, they display God's justice in the successive stages of sin. The underlying idea of *the first* is external visitation ; of *the second*, inward decay by removal of Divine blessings and restraint ; of *the third*, consummation of sin which lays the nation prostrate. Declension in communities and individuals is first punished with outward chastisements. If these fail heavier judgments follow. If judgments and mercies are unheeded, and declension merges into apostasy, nothing remains but destruction. When repeated acts of sin have produced confirmed habits of wickedness, God says, "I will not again pass by them any more." **III. They are conditional in their issue.** In the first and second, judgment is arrested by prayer. The prophet was encouraged in duty and the nation reprieved in sorrow. If we saw sin as rebellion against God, and productive of impending danger, we should be more earnest in prayer that God would forgive and pass by. But "reprieves are not pardons." Many are spared, but not reclaimed ; reduced to straits, but never return to God. They neglect advantages, sin away the day of grace, until prayer does not avail. Total destruction will come upon impenitent sinners. "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people : cast them out of my sight and let them go forth."

The Encounter between Priest and Prophet.—*Verses* 10—17.

These verses contain an interesting episode, and present the prophet of God undaunted in danger. We see the issue of his preaching and the requital for his pains. Amaziah, the idolatrous priest of Bethel, is greatly incensed, resolves by force and fraud to get rid of Amos.

I. The conduct of the priest. Amaziah must be viewed as representative of the system of which he was no doubt the ecclesiastical head. 1. *He seeks to silence the prophet by civil power.* He seems to have been intimate with the king, pretends great kindness to him, when really he consulted his own interests. If Amos prevailed, his gods would starve, and Jerusalem would have all the custom. False teachers prove most cruel persecutors. Their authority is based on the patronage

of the great and the support of the state. They are uncharitable in feeling and impotent in power. Flattery may find friends, but truth alone will stand. 2. *He brings false charges against the prophet's conduct.* Every word has weight, like so many daggers, to stab the prophet. (1) He makes false accusation against the *character* of the prophet. He was the proud pompous hierarch of a popular religion, a system upheld by prestige and patronage. Amos in his estimation was a needy vagrant, a contemptuous "seer." (2) He makes false accusation against the *motives* of the prophet. He insinuates Amos to be a mean, self-interested person, plying his vocation to "eat bread." Self-interested persons, worldly priests, measure others by their own motives. Those who make godliness a gain, and are governed by hopes of preferment and wealth, understand not the aims of God's servants, and think to rule others by inducements which influence them. (3) He makes false accusation against the *conduct* of the prophet. He charges him with *conspiracy.* "Amos hath conspired against thee." This was a most dangerous accusation, in the unsettled condition of the kingdom. This spirit has characterized a false priesthood in every age. Prophets and apostles, martyrs and reformers, and Christ himself, were all subject to the same persecution—the same artful and malicious design to excite the temporal power against them. 3. *He brings false charges against the prophet's preaching.* In whatever spirit Amaziah reports the words of the prophet, he keeps back or perverts the truth. He artfully frames the language to establish his charge. He makes a base *slander.* The prophet had uttered the downfall of the house of Jeroboam, but not in a spirit of rebellion and treason. "Amos hath conspired against *thee.*" This was done *openly* at *Bethel*—think of that! "In the midst of thy people Israel." "Commotions of the people are dangerous, O king! The people *resent* this. If thou dost not act they will." "The land is not able to bear all his words." God's people have often been represented as enemies to the state and disloyal to princes. The true power of Christian character has been felt and hated. But "unable to resist the wisdom and the spirit" with which servants of God have spoken, recourse has been had to illegal methods, and men have not dared to appeal to reason and the word of God (Acts vi. 10). "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." 4. *He advises the prophet to consult his own safety.* "Flee thee away." As a seeming friend he requests him to flee away from danger. (1) He urges him in *the language of terror.* It is not safe to prophesy here against the king. This is Bethel, the centre of worship and the seat of government. He could expect no encouragement or sanction in the court. He was too blunt, too faithful, to be heard. Go to Judah. (2) He urges him in *the language of threats.* As a haughty prelate he assumes authority. "Prophesy not again any more," in my parish and jurisdiction. We have enough of schism and sedition. I am resolved to suspend and silence thee. Prohibition from man will not destroy the authority of God. Peter and John were forbidden to preach, Luther and Knox were threatened, but they could not but speak. "We ought to obey God rather than men." **II. The behaviour of the prophet.** Amos was too deeply impressed with a sense of duty to be swayed by arguments like these. 1. *He repudiates the personal charge.* "I was no prophet," &c. He was a humble shepherd, neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet by profession. Content to cultivate and gather figs, he would never have thrust himself into office. He was a labouring man, neither ashamed of his origin nor employ. Others may boast of rank and authority, but God chooses the weak and foolish things of the world to confound the wise and mighty. 2. *He asserts his Divine commission.* "The Lord took me." What the priest forbade, God commanded. "Go, prophesy." Amaziah was in direct rebellion against God, Amos was acting in obedience to God. God often calls men from flocks and herds to stand before priests and princes. They may not be recognized by the learned scribe, the proud prelate, and the king's court but they are conscious of a Divine mission, and are determined to

fulfil it. 3. *He refuses to leave the path of duty.* Amaziah might be influenced by the fear of man, Jonah may escape from Nineveh, but Amos fears not the wrath of a king. God sent him to Israel, not to Judah, and from Israel he would not go. If we are conscious of God's sanction we shall be supported in trial and courageous in danger. This made Amos resolute against Amaziah; Nathan free with David; Elijah bold with Ahab; John faithful with Herod; and the apostles confident before the world. One prophet sent by God shall overcome the hosts of Baal, though backed by the power of king and queen. "Should such a man as I flee?" 4. *He repeats his solemn message.* He is not terrified by priest or king. Though forbidden to prophesy, he desists not, but denounces God's words and bids the priest attend to the awful sentence. (1) *His wife would be dishonoured.* She would be openly and publicly insulted at the storming of the city. (2) *His children would be slain by the sword.* He had trained them up, and God would cut them off, in idolatry. (3) *His lands would be taken by the enemy.* They would be allotted to others by line (Deut. xxxii. 9 : 2 Sam. viii. 2 : Ps. xvi. 6). Thus he would lose his heirs and his inheritance also. (4) *He would die a captive in a foreign land.* He who now gloried in priesthood and position should become an exile and die in a land polluted by idols. The greatest misery that could happen to one expecting a grave in the land of promise. (5) *The kingdom itself would be destroyed.* "And Israel shall surely go into captivity." The prediction is in the very words of the priest himself (ver. 11), and a warning to all who oppose the servants and abuse the gifts of God. If we pollute the people of God, we shall be dishonoured ourselves. Wicked parents and ungodly ministers reap what they sow and bring a curse upon posterity. Sinners and seducers can never make void the threatening of God. The most haughty and powerful cannot defy judgments which offend them. Opposition may provoke God to contend with them as individuals, and bring ruin upon their families and estates, upon body and soul, for time and eternity.

A Political Priest and a True Prophet.

Let us view the transactions of this high priest, and we shall find a complete character of a false prophet, or the perfect picture of a politician. 1. *They use to flatter and delude great ones,* making them to believe that none are their friends but such as say as they say, do whatever they would have them do, and humour them in their sins;—that they are their foes that, like Amos, deal faithfully and plainly with them; and this is no small part of great men's misery, that they have few about them that dare or will deal faithfully with them. They may use the Litany (in this sense) with that alteration which the poor curate used, when he saw his lord come into the Church, *O God the Father of Heaven, have mercy upon us Right Honourable sinners.* Their state is worse (in this respect) than that of inferior persons, who are plainly and truly told of their sins, when these are soothed up to their destruction. 2. *They calumniate and belie the true prophets.* They observe the rule of Machiavel—Lie lustily, somewhat will stick though it be never so false. 3. *They labour with might and main to suppress and silence the true prophets.* They know that their kingdom cannot long stand, if once the faithful ministers of Christ be countenanced; light and darkness, the ark and Dagon, Christ and Belial, can never subsist together. This made Amaziah use both force and fraud to rid the land of Amos. 4. *They labour to suppress good men before they can be heard.* They must not speak nor dispute the case. Thus Amaziah clandestinely accuseth Amos to the king, when he could make no defence for himself. 5. *They usually mingle some truth with their lies.* As fowlers do mix some wheat with their chaff, to catch the birds the sooner; so did Amaziah mix some truth with his lies. Amos hath said Jeroboam shall die by the sword (that was false), and Israel shall surely go into captivity (that was true) [*Hall*].

Let us now view the true prophet of God. He is the very opposite of a time-serving, conventional priest.

1. *He is Divinely called to his work.* He is no mere professional servant. He does not assume office for his own interests, nor does he run before he is sent. He does not always belong to the regular order of prophets, nor is he always qualified by human learning, but God has appeared to him and uttered the word, "Go prophesy to my people." 2. *He is often persecuted and opposed in his work.* He predicts judgments which some cannot bear. He is called an enthusiast and "a mover of sedition," denounced, reproached, and hindered in his work. If open violence does not answer, secret fraud is devised (Jer. xi. 19; xii. 6). Hence men display their personal spite and vile ingratitude. But they will find it perilous to fight against God and persecute his servants. 3. *He is always faithful in doing his work.* Truthful men are valiant. Cowards fear and creep behind. God's servants stand their ground and are faithful to their trust. They are not deterred by false friends nor threatening foes. Fidelity to conscience and God often costs them their life. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion." "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

The sins of Amaziah. 1. Contradicting God's command. "Prophesy not against Israel." 2. Slanderous report of God's servant. "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." 3. Frustrating God's purpose. (*a.*) In seeking to crush the truth. (*b.*) In tempting the messenger to flee from duty. The prophet's defence proved the nature of the charge. Amaziah hears his doom, like Peter telling Ananias, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."

Ver. 10. *Not able to bear all his words.* Truth often an offence—always a power in the land. The world is compelled to confess their impotence against it.

Ver. 12. *Worldly advice to God's servants.* "Flee," &c. This given by Pharisees to Christ (Luke xiii. 31). It is folly to declare alarming truths before the great; impiety to oppose established customs and eminent dignitaries; and insolent to preach the gospel in king's chapels. Smooth things and popular heresies must pass current with some, and royalty must pass undisturbed to destruction.

This was fit advice for the priest of Bethel. Carnal men do not rise above carnal motives; but true prophets consult not flesh and blood, have higher motives than safety, bread, &c. Apostles, Reformers, and Missionaries took no counsel with advisers like Amaziah. Duty before temporal interests. Pray for help to discharge it. This advice proves — 1. Selfishness, 2. Timidity, and 3. Disobedience.

Ver. 13. Observe, this priest of Bethel claims honour for it, not because it is the *Lord's* sanctuary, but because it is the *king's* sanctuary, and not because it is the house of *God*, but the house of *Jeroboam*. All claims of reverence for a Church simply and merely as a *national establishment*, independently of Divine institution, are no better than these assertions of Amaziah. The first royal propounder of what is now called Erastianism, as far as we know, was Jeroboam I.; the first priestly advocate of it, as far as we know, was Amaziah [*Wordsworth*].

Ver. 14. *Herdman.* One of that class to which Abraham, and Moses, and David had belonged; but not rich in fields and herds, in men-servants and maid-servants, like the first; nor learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians, like the second; nor with any, the most distant, intimations that he might one day be the shepherd of a people, like the third [*F. D. Maurice*].

1. God loves to appear to men diligent in their calling. Moses keeping sheep, David following the ewes, and Saul seeking the asses, &c. 2. When God calls we must be ready to forsake

all. Amos leaves his herds, disciples their nets, and Abraham his country. Grace makes men able to do and willing to suffer what God commands. 3. The sphere must be left with God to appoint. Whatever the lot may be, we must be satisfied. Other places may seem better, but God knows best. 4. When once the place is fixed we must not quit it without Divine guidance. Nothing warrants unlawful fear in the performance of duty or neglect of it. Providence must never be construed to sanction flight or withdraw us from our work. We may apparently do little good, be permitted to prophesy in another place and be more successful. But we must abide in our calling, never give way to corrupt principles, and shun not to declare the whole counsel of God.

Ver. 17. *Opposers of God's word examples of his justice and indignation.* Amaziah led God's people into idolatry, and his wife is an harlot in the city. He destroyed the souls of the people, and his own family fall by the sword. Given to the world, he was the chief cause why Israel was despoiled of their inheritance, and his land is divided among the conquerors. He was the chief cause of Israel's exile, and would not let them believe it, the threatening was verified upon himself, and without recovery died in a polluted land [*Hutcheson*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VII.

Vers. 1—3. *Locusts.* God hath armies of insects and little contemptible creatures wherewith to punish disobedient people. He needs not men to destroy us, he hath frogs and flies, lice and locusts, and these shall do it (Ex. x. 14: 2 Chron. vii. 13: Ps. lxxviii. 46). Much of God's might is seen in these little armies, they all fulfil the word of God's commands. Let none, then, murmur at second causes, but still look up to the first, lest by fretting at our troubles we double them [*Hall*].

Vers. 4—6. *Fire.* The power of this fire showed it to be a fire of God; it was a precursor of the great conflagration which will consume the world—even the sea itself—at the Great Day (2 Pet. iii. 10). Compare Jer. li. 32, where the fire of God burning Babylon is described as burning its lakes and moats [*Wordsworth*].

"On Prague's proud arch the fires of ruin glow,
His blood-dyed waters murmuring far below."
[*Campbell.*]

By whom? The time is come when men will ask this question in relation to the Church. How can it stand? The numbers are decreasing viewed in relation to the growth of the population. By whom shall it arise? Not by statesmen, scientists, ritualists, and priests. A new order of men are required to enable the Church to stand. Heaven raise them up [*Dr Thomas*]!

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of" [*Tennyson*].

Vers. 7—9. *Judgments.* They are all exactly framed as it were by line and measure (Dan. v. 27). Justice is essential to God; he may as soon cease to be God, as cease to be just; hence he is called *the righteous judge* (Gen. xviii. 25), and the *just Lord, who will do no iniquity* (Zeph. iii. 5). He is just in and of himself, and just in his *laws*, just in his *decrees*, just in the *execution* of those decrees, just in the *government of the world*, just in his rewards, and just in his judgments; he is not only righteous in some, but in all his ways (Ps. cxlv. 17) [*Hall*].

Vers. 10, 11. Latimer spoke his mind before Henry VIII. and was complained of by his enemies. One of them kneeled before the king and accused him of seditious doctrines. Latimer turned first to his accuser and asked, "What form of preaching would you appoint me to preach before a king?" No answer was given to this and several other questions. Then he turned to the king, confessed his unworthiness to preach, declared that he was called to it, but would give way to his betters. "But if your Grace allow me for a

preacher, I would desire your Grace to discharge my conscience, give me leave to frame my discourse according to mine audience." The king was pleased with Latimer's words, who was congratulated by his friends, and told with tears in their eyes that they looked for nothing but confinement in the Tower for him [*Whitecross*].

Ver. 14. *Herdman.* In Palestine at the present day none but the very poor consent to be herdmen, and only such gather sycamore fruit or use it [*The Land and Book*].

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **The visions continued from ch. vii. 9. 2. Summer**] Late fruit, fully ripe (2 Sam. xvi. 1 : Mic. vii. 1); a symbol of a people ripe for judgment. **3. Howl.**] Songs of joy (ch. vi. 5 : 2 Sam. xix. 36) would be turned into lamentation on account of the dead. **Silence**] Lit. silently, not with customary rites and professional mourners; the terror of God and dread of the enemy would make them afraid to speak. "An admonition to bow beneath the overwhelming severity of the judgment of God, as in Zeph. i. 7 (cf. Heb. ii. 20 and Zech. ii. 17)." **4. Hear**] The nobles hated reproof. **Swallow**] Heb. gape after, earnestly desire (Job vii. 2); pant after goods as wild beasts for prey. They sought to rid the land of all the poor. **5** and **6** describe the method of doing this. **New moon**] Festivals were impatiently kept; they begrudged the regular holiday and suspension of trade (Num. xxviii. 11 : 2 Kings iv. 23). **Set forth**] Lit. open out to sell. **Falsifying**] Heb. perverting the balances of deceit (Hos. xii. 7). Money was weighed. They increased the price both ways, dishonestly trading and breaking the command (Deut. xxv. 13—15). **6. Poor**] Made so poor that he was necessitated to sell himself for silver, which he owed, or a pair of shoes, which he could not pay for. **7. Sworn**] to punish such conduct, by *the pride*, by Himself (Hos. v. 5; vii. 10). **Forget**, *i. e.* leave unpunished. **8. Punishment**] will be so great that the earth shall quake, its inhabitants mourn, and the globe will rise and fall like a flood. **9. Noon**] Darkness then an emblem of great calamities (Jer. xv. 9 : Ezek. xxxii. 7—10); a type of judgments upon ungodly people and of the great day of accounts. **10. Feasts**] will be turned into mourning; **baldness** as a sign of it (Is. iii. 24 : Jer. xlviii. 37). Mourning deep as that for the death of an only son (Jer. vi. 26 : Zech. xii. 10). **11. Famine**] The light and comfort of God's word shall fail; they despise now what they shall look for in vain then. **12. Wander**] Lit. reel, like drunken men. **Seek**] under pressure of calamity. **13.**] Hunger and thirst so great that the strongest give way and faint, how much more the weak (Is. xl. 30). **14. Sin**] The calves by which Samaria sins. **God**] The other golden calf at Dan (1 Kings xii. 26—30). **Liveth**] Formula of the oath. Swearing by these objects shows that young men and maidens journeyed to Beersheba and worshipped idols. The ground of all their misery was forsaking God, who commands all appeals to be made to Himself as the Creator and Governor of all things (Deut. vi. 13; x. 20).

HOMILETICS.

A BASKET OF SUMMER FRUIT.—*Verses* 1, 2.

Under a new type the final subversion of the state is represented. As summer fruits portend ripe harvests, so the sins of Israel ripened them for destruction. Taking the basket of fruit as an emblem of ripeness for judgment, notice—

I. A ripeness which is gradual. Nothing is matured at once. There must be seed-time before harvests; buds and flowers before fruits. Individual character is of slow growth. Seeds of national ills ripen secretly. The interval between the spring and the reaping time is defined in nature and religion. II. A ripeness which is ruinous. Men grow in wickedness as well as in holiness; ripen for destruction as well as for salvation. God's dealings influence according to moral condition. The sun which melts the wax hardens the clay. The dew

and rain water the earth, but injure the fruit. God's mercies and judgments ripen for glory or for shame. A condition which is spiritually rotten can produce nothing but decay and untimely end. Some people are like stubble laid out to dry in the sun and ripen for the fire. "They shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." **III. A ripeness which terminates existence.** "The end is come upon my people." In summer nothing more is to be done but reap the crops. Good or bad, the time is come and it must be cut down. God's dealings with Israel were completed. They had neglected to reform. Their harvest was past and their summer ended. A period comes when God no longer spares a people. The fruit must be gathered and devoured by the enemy. The days are fulfilled and the end is come (Lam. iv. 18). "An end is come, the end is come; it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come."

Fruit from the Heavenly Orchard.

We may derive from these words the following lessons. 1. God gives **fruit.** "The fruit of the Spirit," &c. "The tree of Life that beareth all manner of precious fruit." 2. God's fruit is **ripe.** "It is *summer* fruit." The fruit of sin is sour; sweet to the taste, but bitter afterwards—"pleasures of sin for a season." Hence—3. God's fruit is **wholesome**, like all ripe fruit, regulating and adjusting food of other sort. Christianity is a grand controlling and regulating force. The soil that grows the fruits of the Spirit cannot nourish growths of an opposite character. 4. God's fruit is **satisfying.** Even ripe fruit is not long satisfying. Lawful pleasures do not bring contentment. The fruit that the soul craves grows not in earthly orchards. 5. God's fruit is **sustaining.** Certain kinds of fruit will appease appetite for awhile without any sustentation. The fruit of God imparts strength that is permanent; in care, sickness, bereavement, and death. 6. God's fruit is **stimulating.** It is the fruit of the vine, "*the true vine*," yielding "*the best wine.*" It is the stimulus of waning powers; prompts to action where energies would otherwise be dormant. 7. God's fruit is **plentiful.** "A *basket* of fruit," always replenished, multiplying in the use, like the "twelve baskets" of fragments, &c. The basket always *filled.* There is no dearth in God's orchard; no grudging in his supplies; enough for all, everywhere, at all times. 8. God's fruit is **cheap.** "Wine and milk, without money and without price," &c. [*The Study*].

A Day of Sadness.—*Verse* 3.

The prophet now describes the greatness of approaching judgments to rouse attention to a sense of danger—universal mourning and universal death would afflict the land. 1. *Temple music would be turned into grief.* The songs and sacred solemnities of the temple would cease. Mirthful music would end in grievous misery. Sin turns the greatest joy into the greatest heaviness, the loudest music into the bitterest howlings. If men do not sing in a day of grace, they will howl in a time of wrath. "Those that will not serve God with gladness of heart," says an old author, "in the abundance of all things, shall serve him in sadness of heart in the want of all things (Deut. xxviii. 47, 48)." 2. *Mortality would be prevalent in every place.* Sin brings sword, pestilence, and famine (Ezek. xiv. 21); sweeps away its thousands, and fills the land with lamentation and mourning. History tells of populations carried away by Divine judgments like leaves before the wind (Is. lxiv. 6). The picture in Israel is a type of many a fact in providence. *Many* dead—dead *in every place* and buried in common pits, without customary rites. Grief could find no vent to relieve itself. The sorrow could not wear away in utterance. The burden was intolerable and the silence universal. The living and the dead were solemn as the grave. How sad that everlasting death which awaits an ungodly race!

"Death loves a shining mark, a signal blow" [*Young*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. *A basket*, &c. 1. *A type of God's goodness in nature.* He gives fruit in due season, in rich abundance, &c. He never left himself without a witness (Acts xiv. 17). 2. *A type of human diligence in co-operating with God.* Beasts eat without industry. Man has to till the ground and cultivate the trees. The *fruit* must be gathered and the *basket* made. If we do not work, neither can we eat. "There is a basket of fruit which is so ripe, that it has been gathered, and it is a sort of fruit—summer fruit—which will not keep, which will not lay by until winter, but must be eaten at once. It teaches—1. That there is a ripeness in *God's purposes.* God always times his decrees. In *the first* and *second advent* of Jesus Christ. In our own personal affairs God gives deliverance not in *thy* time, but in *his.* Trust him for mercy in its time, &c. 2. That *nations have their ripeness*, and that when they come to their ripeness they *must be destroyed.* Sceptics may entertain doubts concerning individual transgression and personal punishment, but history proves that national judgments have been sent from God. Take Babylon, Greece, and Rome. We as a people are guilty, and should not be proud and self-righteous. 3. That there is *a ripeness of men* as well as of summer fruit. With the righteous a time of ripening for heaven, a ripening in *knowledge, experience*, and *spirituality.* With the ungodly a ripening in the love of sin and hardness of heart, a ripening for eternal judgment! Take heed! Be renewed in heart and ripened for eternal glory" [*Spurgeon*].

Vers. 1, 2. The *manner* in which the truth is conveyed to the prophet's mind by different representations reminds us of the course pursued towards the apostles by the Lord, and teaches that we should endeavour to answer the purpose of God, and to let the truth sink deeply into our minds, that being clearly understood it may powerfully affect us, and make us ready to impart it to others [*Ryan*].

First, those nearest destruction are often the most negligent and stupid. They need to be told often of their danger and roused to diligence. God warns them often and leaves them without excuse. *Second*, the servants of God have need to be instructed that they may warn others. Attention to the revelation must be quickened. *Behold.* The vision itself must be *seen* and explained. "What seest thou?" They must declare nothing but what they have received. "*Thus* hath the Lord God showed unto me."

Meditate carefully on the *object* presented to view. It suggests the idea of a tree which had been planted, tended, watered with the rain and dew; it had blossomed, budded, brought forth fruit; its work was done; the fruit was gathered; no pains of the gardener, no change in the season, no influence of the sun, could now alter the character of that fruit. At previous times, when the leaves and blossom came forth, there would be room for anxiety or hope; there would afterwards be room for doubt as to its future size and goodness, according to its progress during the weeks of its growth,—but now all was over. They were either apples of Sodom, or pleasant to the eye and good for food. Now was the time not to cherish their growth, but to try their quality. "The end is come" [*Ryan*].

HOMILETICS.

The Deeds of Covetousness.—*Verses 4—6.*

After describing the calamities, Amos now sets forth the ground of these calamities. Israel had broken both tables of the law and sinned against great light and love. They sought to secure themselves in irreligion towards God and unright-

eous conduct towards men. In their oppressive and covetous rapacity they are summoned to hear threatenings against their cruel deeds. "*Hear this.*" Their covetousness is seen—

I. **In cruelty to men.** An avaricious man is naturally a selfish man. He makes laws of his own and regards not the interests of others. He isolates himself from the common brotherhood, and constitutes himself an all-absorbing and enlarging circle. 1. *Oppression of the poor.* "O ye that swallow up the needy." They panted for the needy as wild beasts for prey, and sought to rid the land of the poor. Those who devour the poor without pity or compassion are inhuman in their disposition. They have iron teeth, vent their wantonness where there is no power to resist, and eat up the people "as they eat bread" (Ps. xiv. 4). "There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw-teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men." 2. *Selling and enslaving the poor.* "Buy the poor for silver." The nobles of Israel oppressed the needy, that they might eventually trade in them. They gained the purses, and then sought the persons of their bondmen. Corn was dear, and they resolved to make merchandise of men. The mean and selfish estimate their fellows at a contemptible price. "A little silver or a pair of shoes." Human nature is insulted, the rights of property disregarded, and the laws of liberty trampled upon, by greedy oppressors. "He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker; but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor." **II. In contempt for the worship of God.** "When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn?" They kept the Sabbath with a weary, impatient spirit. Religious services were too great restraints upon them. "When will this service be over, that we may attend to business again?" Covetous men are formal and hypocritical in their devotion. Their hearts are in the mart, the field, and the ways of "buying, and selling, and getting gain." The world does not tire them, *they* are not anxious for a day of rest. Religion is irksome. It interrupts worldly pursuits and is often turned into means of traffic. Men crowd the temple with tables like the money-changers, and convert the Sanctuary into a palace of Mammon. They reject the true God and worship a false one. They begrudge time for Christian worship, and like Doeg are *detained before the Lord*, when they long to be in the counting-house. "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it!" **III. In fraudent trade with men.** If men grudge time for God, they will grudge right to man; if they resist the claims of piety, they will soon fall into tricks of dishonesty. These tricks are manifold. A few are given in the text. 1. *False weights and measures.* In two ways they defrauded the poor—(*a*) *diminishing the measure,* "making the ephah small;" and (*b*) *increasing the price,* "and the shekel great." They doubly deceived, by paring down the quantity and by uneven balances obtained more silver for what they sold. This was disobedience to the law (Lev. xix. 35, 36), and violation of the conditions on which they held the land (Deut. xxv. 13—15). In robbing God you indulge a propensity to injure man; in giving less and taking more than you ought you bring a double curse—deprivation of blessing and increase of pains which pierce the soul with many sorrows. "Take heed and beware of covetousness." 2. *Adulteration of food.* "Sell the refuse of the wheat." The bran or untilled grain which fell through the sieve. The worst was sold and the best paid for. The poor are victimized now. Short weight and short measure are too common in England. Almost every article of food is adulterated, and even poison sold for bread! Men are hard-hearted, dishonest, inexorable as the taskmasters of Egypt, in driving bargains! We are influenced by the spirit of gain, and worship too much in the temple of Mammon. Every nation has its idol, and money is our god. "The love of money is the root of *all* evil."

THE CURSE OF COVETOUSNESS.—*Verses* 7—10.

Good men would rather be poor by providence than rich by sin. He that

becomes rich by unlawful means, that hasteth to be rich, may haste to his ruin, and shall not be innocent or unpunished (Prov. xxviii. 20: 1 Tim. vi. 9—11). Covetousness, more than any other sin, brings its own punishment. But in addition to this God often visits it with positive infliction, as in the text.

I. The certainty of the curse. "The Lord hath sworn." If oaths among men confirm a promise, does not God's oath indicate immutable purpose? He swears that he will never forget any of their works. All men's doings are known to God. No lapse of times nor change of circumstances veil them from his omniscient glance. Iniquity is never forgotten until forgiven in Christ. Flight of years may efface the memory, but cannot ward off the fruit of transgression. God can sooner cease to be, than forget to punish the wickedness of men. He may seem to forget, but a faithful record is kept, an immutable purpose is formed, and eventually justice will give its reward. "Woe, and a thousand woes, to the man who is cut off by an oath of God, from all benefit of pardoning mercy." II. The terribleness of the curse. Mark the emphasis of the question—"*shall not?*" The appeal is to human consciences. How can it be otherwise? Great sins bring grievous judgments. 1. *Curse like an earthquake*—will bring terror and consternation. The land is represented as shaking, returning to primeval chaos, and suffering under the weight of sin. Wicked men are a curse to the earth, and all creatures testify indignation against their conduct (Ps. lx. 1, 2: Rom. viii. 22). "For this shall the earth mourn and the heavens above be black." 2. *Curse like a flood*—will rise up and deluge the land; calamities shall overflow them. Judgments will be like the breaking forth of waters. Floods of sorrow, like the deluge of old, sweep impenitent sinners from the earth. General calamities affect insensate earth, until it casts out or drowns its wicked inhabitants. "The Lord God of Hosts is he that toucheth the land and it shall melt, and all that dwell therein shall mourn; and it shall rise up wholly like a flood, and shall be drowned as by the flood of Egypt." III. The suddenness of the curse. "The sun to go down at noon." It is not a gradual, a natural, but unlooked-for, untimely sinking. So the sun of prosperity rises and shines upon the wicked in all its splendour; but God darkens the sky *in the clear day*. The darkness is blacker in contrast with the light; the sorrow the sadder when it succeeds festive joy. Thus prosperity ends in ruin and sinful prospects fade away. "Her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed and confounded." IV. The consequences of the curse. Prosperity is turned into misery, and mirth into mourning. Their common and holy feasts, their domestic and temple songs, into lamentation. 1. *Mourning universal.* "Every one mourn" (ver. 8). Rich and poor without exception. Judgments were prevalent as the sins (Hos. iv. 3), penetrated all ranks and suffered none to escape. 2. *Mourning with ceremonial rites.* Instead of gay attire they would put on *sackcloth*. It was not the time for ornaments and fine clothing. *Baldness* would be upon every head. They would either shave in sorrow, or pull the hair off their heads in anguish (Ezra ix. 3). Inward distress revealed itself in outward signs. 3. *Mourning most bitter.* "As the mourning of an only son." The death of an only son was regarded as the most mournful of events. In Egypt one universal cry arose from the death of the firstborn. Parents may lose one or of many and be comforted in the possession of others. But the loss of *an only* child can never be repaired. "Make thee mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation: for the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us." 4. *Mourning without relief.* It is not an *eclipse*, but a going down of the sun. The duration of sorrow is unto posterity, the *end* of the kingdom. The clouds will not vanish soon away. The wrath of God would abide upon them. When they looked for an end, the day would still *be bitter*. At evening time sometimes light will arise; but to the impenitent the day grows darker, and the night will be darkest of all. Bitterness will be the issue, and the end the beginning of sorrows. "What will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jer. v. 31). "This shall ye have at my hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 4—6. *Covetous men.* 1. Are *cruel* to others. 2. *Selfish* in their aims. 3. *Dishonest* in their conduct. 4. *Weary* in religious worship. They are never at rest in their minds, never satisfied in their possessions, and never idle in their pursuits.

The *value worldly men* set upon the poor. Dross and dung, the filth and offscouring of society (1 Cor. iv. 13). Contrast this with *God's judgment* of the poor. He esteems them the excellent of the earth (Ps. xvi. 3); the glory of the world (Is. iv. 5); and too good for ungrateful men (Heb. xi. 38). If men make a prey of the poor, God will make an example of them.

Sin in wrong measures once begun is unbroken. All sin perpetuates itself. It is done again because it has been done before. But sins of a man's daily occupation are continued of necessity, beyond the simple force of habit and the ever-increasing dropsy of covetousness. To interrupt sin is to risk detection. But then how countless the sins which their poor slaves must needs commit hourly, whenever the occasion comes! And yet, although among us human law recognizes the Divine law, and annexes punishment to its breach, covetousness sets both at nought. When human law was enforced in a city after a time of negligence scarcely a weight was found to be honest. Prayer went up to God on the *Sabbath* and fraud up to God on the other six days [*Pusey*].

Ver. 7. *The excellency of Jacob.* By this title he would teach — 1. That nothing beside God can make a people truly excellent, enjoy what dignity and excellency they will. 2. That it is great ingratitude of a people, when being excellent through him, they do not acknowledge him, nor walk answerable [*Hutcheson*].

The favour and presence of God with a people is the glory and excellency of a people. It is not corn, wine, women, health, wealth, or multitude, that make a nation happy for then Turks and Tartars, Barbarians and Indians, would excel God's people, for they abound in these external comforts; but *happy is that people whose God is the Lord* (Ps. cvi. 20; cxlviii. 14: Jer. ii. 11: Luke ii. 32). Hence Moses glories in this above all other privileges (Deut. iv. 7, 8). The fruition and enjoyment of God's favour is the life of our lives, and the honour of our honours; without this we may write *Ichabod* upon all that we have. Hence the greater is their sin who dishonour him with sin and turn the glory which he hath put upon them into shame. This makes the Lord to swear that he will strip them of their privileges, and make them naked as in the day when they were born [*Hall*].

Vers. 8—10. This will be a sudden ruin, a check in the midst of apparent prosperity, *irresistible* as the waters of a flood, *sudden* as the setting of the sun at noon, *gloomy* and dreadful as a darkness which should at once succeed to the light of a clear day. Those feasts, which had been the instruments of their pleasure and the cause of much of their sin, would be succeeded by mourning; luxurious and licentious music would give place to sounds of bitter lamentation. Instead of purple and fine linen, sackcloth would be their clothing, and delicious ointments and costly tiaras would be followed by baldness [*Ryan*].

1. To any man the sun sets at noon, when he is suddenly snatched away by death in the very midst of his life. 2. When he is suddenly destroyed in the midst of earthly prosperity. 3. "But it has still wider application. When the Lord shall come to judgment, at a time when the world, in its self-security, looketh not for him (cf. Matt. xxiv. 37), this earth's sun will set at noon, and the earth be covered with darkness in bright daylight. Every judgment that falls upon an ungodly people or kingdom, as the ages roll away, is a harbinger of the approach of the final judgment" [*Keil*].

Changes in human destiny and ex-

perience. *Clear* days, *dark* days, and *bitter* days.

Sin is a bitter thing. Bitter in itself and its consequences. It promises pleasure and brings pain; liberty, and brings bondage; happiness, and brings misery. Its misery is personal and eternal, darkness without day, sorrow without relief.

HOMILETICS.

A Famine of the Word.—*Verses* 11—14.

The prophet now predicts far greater evils than temporal judgments. A famine of the word, one of the saddest events that could happen a Divinely taught people. This is the last and sorest of all calamities. When God will not speak to men by his servants and word it is a sign that he will punish and reject them.

I. **The word of God is the true nourishment of man.** Every kind of life requires nutriment. Man has a higher life than appetite and sensation. His spiritual nature is sustained by the word of God alone. A real communication from God is essential to life. Man has ever longed for this. *Speak, Lord!* has always been the cry of humanity. God has spoken. His word satisfies the cravings of the heart and solves the problems of life. Here is wisdom for the ignorant and righteousness for the guilty; comfort for the sorrowful and redemption for the lost; milk for babes and strong meat for mature age. It is *meat* indeed and *drink* indeed. "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." "Thy words were found and I did eat them." II. **Contempt of the word of God may bring a famine of the word.** "I will send a famine." God had raised up and sent prophets to the people; but they despised religious instruction, profaned God's sanctuary, and persecuted his servants. God can *withhold* religious privileges and leave people in darkness according to his good pleasure. But when they despise the word he will *withdraw* it. He will cease to give when his gifts are scorned; to love, when his love is contemned. 1. *With individuals* there is often a famine of the word. A person for a long time enjoys gospel light and hears the Scriptures explained and enforced. He trifles with these advantages and heeds not the word. Circumstances change, business calls elsewhere, and in foreign lands or distant colonies he finds no provision. He is not fed with the bread of life. Many a sick chamber has been embittered and many a dying hour darkened by the remembrance of warnings despised. "They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof" (Prov. i. 24—31). 2. *In the sanctuary* there is often a famine of the word. When the gospel is rejected and ministers silenced; when the temple is profaned by worldly influences, and religious worship becomes a wearisome toil; God will take his blessings away, and men shall know the price by seeking them and shall not find them. The seven Churches of Asia Minor and the desolate shore of Northern Africa are solemn examples of this. 3. *In the nation* God can send a famine of the word. Unto the Jews were committed the oracles of God. They were highly exalted and Divinely instructed. But ungodliness crept into the temple, corruption tainted the king, and violence filled the land. Direction from God was a part of their blessedness. The want of that direction has now left them a wandering, helpless people. In their distress they cry as of old, "We see not our tokens, there is not one prophet more, not one is there among us that understandeth any more." III. **A famine of the word is the sorest judgment upon any nation.** It is a miserable state to cry for bread and have none. 1. *A famine of the word is a greater evil than a famine of bread.* The soul is superior to the body, and knowledge, love, and truth are more necessary than bread. Man does not live by bread alone. The mind requires food and cannot feed upon husks. If hunger and thirst be painful, how much more lack of spiritual sustenance! Men have hunger, though not always conscious of it. Appetite will be quickened in trouble, and like Saul they will be sore distressed. "God

is departed from me and answereth me no more, neither by *prophets*, nor by dreams." 2. *A famine of the word will cause the strongest to succumb.* "The fair virgins and the young men faint for thirst. The beauty of the virgin and the vigour of youth decay without knowledge." All flesh is grass, and the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field. But God's word abides in its blessed nature and permanent results. Our choicest privileges and fairest sex, our education and wealth, are vain things. The withdrawment of God will cause them to wither away. Physical suffering will follow spiritual famine. "Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed; yea, poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction." 3. *A famine of the word will leave a nation in a deplorable condition.* (1) In a *weak* condition. When men *faint* and thirst they are helpless. Hungry within and scorched with the wrath of God without, who can stand? The wicked faint and sink under their burdens, and have not a shower of rain to quench their burning thirst (Ezek. xxii. 24). (2) In a *fallen* condition. "They shall fall." Fall into danger and the darkness of idolatry and superstition. Men who forsake God will eventually, like Saul, consult wrong sources of comfort and shall not find it. (3) In a *hopeless* condition. "Never rise up again." Without the word we are without bread and without strength; without comfort and without hope. When the word goes, God himself departs, and there is none to deliver us. "God hath forsaken him; persecute and take him."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 11, 12. *The judgment.* 1. Its Author. "*I* will send." 2. Its certainty. "Thus saith the Lord." 3. Its period. "The days come," suddenly and presently. 4. Its consequences. (*a*) Hunger and thirst. (*b*) Exile and anxiety. (*c*) Unsuccessful search. 5. Its importance. "Behold," calling attention to its direful and dreadful nature. "Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water," &c.

Ver. 13. Natural strength falls far short of the strength God gives to his weak people (Is. xl. 29—31); it cannot endure nor carry us through calamities and judgments for sin. Young men shall faint, and those whose condition pleads for pity and respect shall not be spared. "In this hopelessness as to all relief, those too shall fail and sink under their sufferings, in whom life is freshest and strongest, and hope most buoyant. Hope mitigates any sufferings. When hope is gone, the powers of life which it sustains give way" [*Pusey*].

Ver. 14. 1. *The calamity.* "They shall fall and never rise again." Though a man fall, if he has hope of rising again, it brings a certain degree of comfort and strength: but Israel fell into captivity and were not restored. If gentle means cure not, God will make a final end. 2. *The reason of the calamity.* Idolatry in the form of oaths and ascriptions of powers of life to the golden calves. They sware—1. By the *sin* of *Samaria*. 2. By the *god* of *Dan*. 3. By the *manner* of *Beersheba*. By strange gods which they had set up in these places. The whole land was infected by a popular, degrading system which they had set up, and which was the cause of their final overthrow.

The judgment of men and the judgment of God differ much. That which man calls here by way of honour a *god*, that God calls by way of dishonour and detestation a *sin* and abominable (Jer. xvi. 18; xliv. 4). Thus the world calls riches substance, goods happiness (Ps. iv. 6), but the Holy Ghost calls them vanities, thorns, husks, unrighteous mammon. *That which is highly esteemed* in the sight of carnal, superstitious *men* is *an abomination in the sight of God* [*Hall*].

Fall fatally, irrecoverably, as old Eli did when his neck was broken, but first his heart. The ten tribes for their idolatry and contempt of the word never returned out of captivity. From the famine foretold what could follow but irreparable ruin, though for a time things might flourish (Prov. xxix. 1)?

Of that spiritual famine let us be most impatient, and say as Luther did, I would not live in paradise without the word; but with it I could make a shift to live in hell [*Trapp*].

Two subjects in this chap. attract our notice. 1. *God's ordinances slighted.* Let those who turn the Sabbath into a day of trade, and rob their fellow-men of their comforts by their extortions, as they rob God of his honour by their heartless worship, see their own portraits in the address of the prophet; blush for shame, and tremble at the destiny of those who continue in such a state. 2. *Religious instruction withdrawn.* It may not be now exactly with them as with Israel. They may not be wholly excluded from the warning voice of the prophets of God; but the time approaches when repentance will no more be preached to, or be available for, them. When no deliverer will be exhibited to their view, as exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins, their souls will die of an eternal famine. No "bread of life" shall be presented to them for food! No water of life shall quench the flame which guilt shall enkindle in their consciences [*Cobbin*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VIII.

Vers. 1, 2. God hath done more for Britain, or certainly as much, as he did for Abraham's race, and even if we have not rebelled as often as Israel in the wilderness, yet our little rebellions are great because of the greatness of God's goodness. Oh, Christians, be in earnest that the land may be filled with grace; that the torrent of our iniquities may be dried up, lest haply that supposition of a great historian should at last become a fact, and the New Zealander should yet sit on the broken arch of London Bridge, wondering that so great a city could have passed away [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 3. *Mirth.* Many a sigh is heaved amid the loud laughter of folly. Take the fullest cup of earth's best joys. What is this to satisfy desire, to allay trouble, to meet eternity? Even the present end of this short-lived mirth is heaviness, sometimes so intolerable, that death is fled to as the cure of anguish; and to avoid the fear of hell the wretched sinner leaps into it. At best eternity will change this mirth, when that will remain which would be the most desirable riddance—the sting of conscience, as enduring as the pleasures of sin were momentary [*Bridge*].

Ver. 4. *Oppression.*

"Press not a falling man too far" [*Shakespeare*].

Deliver him that suffereth wrong from the hand of the oppressor; and be not faint-hearted when thou sittest in judgment (Eccles. iv. 11).

Ver. 5. *Sabbath.* In God's house and business forget thine own; be there as a member of the Church, not of the commonwealth. Empty thyself of this world, thou art conversant with the next. Let all thy senses have no other object but God; let thine ears be open, but thine eyes shut. Remember God regards the heart of the worshipper. We are never safe till we love him with our whole heart whom we pretend to worship [*Bp Henshawe*]. *Deceit.* Commerce is a providential appointment for our social intercourse and mutual helpfulness. It is grounded with men upon human faith, as with God upon Divine faith. *Balances,* weights, money, are its necessary materials. Impositions, double-dealings; the hard bargain struck with self-complacent shrewdness—this is the *false balance* forbidden alike by law (Lev. xix. 35) and gospel (Matt. vii. 12). Men may commend its wisdom; God not only forbids, but *abominates* it [*Bridge*]. A straight line is the shortest in morals as in geometry [*Rahal*]. Honesty is the best policy.

Vers. 4—6. *Covetousness.* The man who sets his heart on riches must necessarily be a stranger to peace and enjoyment. Fear, care, anxiety, sus-

picion, and jealousy place him on a constant rack. To the toil of getting is added the trouble of keeping his pelf. Avarice is insatiable as the grave, or rather as a gulf without bottom. The more this passion is supplied with fresh fuel the more vehement the flame [*Rusticus*].

Vers. 9, 10. *Go down.* So use prosperity that adversity may not abuse thee. If, in the one, security admits no fears, in the other, despair will afford no hopes. He that in prosperity can foretell a danger, can in adversity foresee deliverance [*F. Quarles*].

Vers. 11—14. When Divine judgments come upon a race which has forgotten and forsaken God; the once despised and hated word is appreciated again. Men "hunger and thirst" for it, but often at first not in the right way. They desire as speedily as possible to hear of promises and consolations, and to these every ear is open. But it is in vain. We now need expect no new revelation from God. We have "his word" in the Scripture. But when this is a long time despised, it follows at last that there is no one to preach it, and without a living preacher it is finally lost. Or if it is preached it has no power to console, and men fail to find what they seek. Thus ensues a longing which is not satisfied. The result is otherwise only when men bow in penitence under the Divine threatening as deserved, and under the Divine Spirit inwardly blame themselves for previous apostasy. But who knows whether man will find room for repentance? Before he reaches that point, while he is in the midst of his vain longing for comfort, he may be snatched away [*Lange*].

"There 's not a joy the world can give like that
it takes away."

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Amos sees God standing, fixed in purpose, by the altar. Posts**] Thresholds (Is. vi. 4). **Cut**] Human victims demanded; wounded with fragments of broken columns (cf. Ps. lxviii. 21; Hab. iii. 13). **Last**] Those left cannot escape. **2.**] The Lord everywhere will pursue and destroy them (ch. ii. 14). **Hell**] Though they hide themselves in the deepest holes and caverns of earth. **Climb**] the greatest heights (Job xx. 6, 7; Jer. li. 53). **3. Carmel**] One of the highest mountains, full of caves and forests (Judg. vi. 2; 1 Sam. xiii. 6). **Serpent**] A great sea-monster (Is. xxvii. 1). **4. Go**] willingly into captivity; the **sword** shall slay them. **Set**] "God has fixed His eye upon them, *i. e.* has taken them under His special superintendence (cf. Jer. xxxix. 12); not to shelter, protect, and bless, but for evil, *i. e.* to punish them" [*Keil*]. **5.**] God is *omnipotent*, able to execute judgment. **Toucheth**] Dissolves the stability of the earth (Ps. xlvi. 7; lxxv. 4). **6. Stories**] Lit. *steps*, perhaps in allusion to Solomon's throne (1 Kings x. 18, 19). **Troop**] Lit. *a band* dividing the waters above from those beneath the heavens (cf. Gen. vii. 11). Others, all the elements and living creatures, called *the host* (Gen. ii. 1). God has bound the waters by perpetual decrees, and all creatures are subject to his control (Ps. ciii. 20, 21). **7. As children**] No longer highly favoured Israelites, but acting like Cushites. Their election of no avail. They had become like the heathen, accursed as Ham, black as Ethiopians, whose skin symbolized spiritual darkness (Jer. xiii. 23). **Brought up**] Israel's deliverance from Egypt no more than the bringing of Assyrians out of former dwelling-places. **8.**] Election therefore will not save the idolatrous nation. God's eye turned upon them, watched in order to punish them (Ps. xxxiv. 14). **Not utterly**] Threatening is mitigated; grace saves a few. **9.**] The figure explains how. **For**] God will disperse Israel, shake them with other nations. Wheat and chaff are mixed together. The wicked, chaff and dust, fall through the sieve and perish; the **grain** (solid grain), the godly, will be preserved, every one shall be saved (Matt. xxii. 12; Luke xxii. 31). **10. Sinners**] who *say* in self-confidence. **Prevent**] To meet one round about, *i. e.* to come from every side. All self-secured sinners shall perish, but the righteous shall be delivered. History proves, that the kingdom of *Israel*, the most profane and idolatrous, fell first by the Assyrians; that *Judah* continued long after, enjoyed considerable prosperity under Hezekiah and Josiah; that a remnant of Israel, left by Assyrians, were

united to Judah, and that others joined them. After the sifting-time comes the prosperity. **11. The booth**] The fallen shepherd, *hut* (not the palace), indicating the feeble condition of the family and nation. **Wall up**] the rents; the two divided nations should become one. **Raise up**] Enlarge and finish the building as of old (2 Sam. vii. 11—16). **12. They**] God's people **possess Edom**, the enemies of the Church, as the gift of God: some, "the remnant of Edom and of all the heathen that are or shall be called by My name, shall possess Me, the Lord." There shall be a grand future restoration. **13.**] The land shall be blessed. The **plowman** overtakes the reaper. One harvest shall scarcely be gathered before preparation shall be made for another; a fulfilment of Lev. xxvi. 5. Eminences themselves shall drop down rich juice of grape. **14.**] The kingdom shall be prosperous; fallen cities rebuilt; vines planted and enjoyed no longer by the enemy. Reviving activity would be seen everywhere. **15.**] All this perpetual. **Plant**] Firm and lasting establishment of them; trees not **torn up**, but firmly rooted and eternally flourishing in joy and peace (Jer. xxxii. 41). This is a beautiful type of the building up, enlargement, and establishment of the Christian Church through Christ. In Him earth will become an Eden, and the Lord will again dwell with a holy people.

HOMILETICS.

The Final Calamity.—*Verses* 1—4.

In previous visions we see the ripeness of the people and the nearness of judgment. In this God himself is engaged to execute it. The temple at Bethel is a fitting emblem of the nation, which gathers round it. The command is given to smite. It shakes, falls, and buries the multitude under its ruins. The sanctuary was overthrown by the judgment of God, and the kingdom of Israel totally destroyed.

I. The nature of the calamity. 1. *It is moral.* God stands upon *the altar* and smites the idolatrous temple. He is ready to depart from them and punish them for apostasy. He was forsaking his people because they had forsaken him. God warns men, before he departs from them. But idolatry provokes him, and turns the place of sacrifice into a throne of vengeance. The posts and pillars of the temple are smitten. "Begin at my sanctuary" (Ezek. ix. 6). The nearer to God, the greater the provocations; the higher the privileges, the nearer to judgment (Dan. ix. 12; 1 Pet. iv. 17). 2. *It is complete.* It involves the utter destruction of the kingdom, the overthrow of the nation in its corporate existence. (1) *The heads of the people.* "Cut them in the head, all of them." Civil and religious leaders had neglected their duty, forgotten their dignity, and disregarded the good of the nation. God is no respecter of persons. Head or heel they cannot escape. "He is terrible to the kings of the earth." (2) *The posterity of the people.* "I will slay the last of them with the sword." God will slay all the remainder, their families and their posterity, all that are left, unto the very last. Justice is unsparing. Great and small, kings and common people, must suffer. Universality in sin brings universality in punishment. Neither pre-eminence nor poverty can protect from guilt. When the head is smitten, the body faints, and every member suffers with it. **II. The certainty of the calamity.** None can escape, for God is Omniscient (verses 2—4), and God is Omnipotent. 1. *God has determined to punish.* He appears in an attitude of judgment; fixed in purpose, to prohibit sacrifices and avenge his honour. Israel's iniquity was like that of the house of Eli, which "could not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever" (1 Sam. iii. 14). 2. *It is impossible to escape punishment.* (1) The *loftiest heights* cannot protect them. (*a*) *Carmel*, with its caves and its forests, a hiding-place for robbers and runaways, could afford no refuge. "I will search and take them out thence." (*b*) *Heaven* itself could not hide them. If they fixed their throne in the stars, and climbed the highest regions of space, they would fall into the hands of God. From thence would he humble, judge, and condemn them. "Thence will I bring them down." (2) *The greatest depths* cannot hide them. (*a*) If they were to "*dig in Hell*," in the deepest and most secret places of the earth, God would find them. "Thence shall my hand take them." (*b*) "Though they be hid in the

bottom of the sea," the deadly serpent would bite them (Is. xxvii. 1). Diving would avail no more than climbing. Height and depth, light and darkness are alike open to the Omnipresent God. Men would gladly hide themselves from God's presence but they cannot. (3) *The longest distance* cannot shelter them. *Captivity* might seem safe, for men do not often slay those whom they carry away. But God would discover them among their enemies, and remotest countries could not befriend them. Sinners would gladly dig into hell or climb up to heaven to escape from God's presence; but God is everywhere. "If I ascend up into *heaven*, thou art there: if I make my bed in *hell*, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the *sea*; even there shall thy hand lead me" (Ps. cxxxix. 7—11).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. *Standing upon the altar.* The place of mercy turned into judgment. The Bible, the means of grace, and every altar of idolatry, literal or spiritual, will be smitten by God. Abused altars will be turned into seats of justice, and cry for vengeance, not sacrifice. "They were in counterfeit of the sacrifices which God had appointed, they offered would-be-atoning sacrifices, and sinned in them; God appeared standing, to behold, to judge, to condemn" [*Pusey*].

Vers. 2—4. 1. The power of Divine judgments. 2. The subservience of God's attributes in their execution. 3. The impossibility of escaping them. "Every syllable is important, even though at first it may seem otherwise. The Holy Spirit designs to shake off our self-flatteries and rouse our innate torpor, that we may not think of God as of ourselves, but know that his power extends to all hiding-places" [*Calvin*].

I. *Desperate efforts of sinners to escape.* They *dig*, they *climb*, and "they go into captivity," willingly, in presumption and fear. In presence of danger men are roused to most strenuous efforts. They multiply endless means, and think they can get out of every trouble by turning away from God. II. *Fruitless efforts of sinners to escape.* What the Psalmist says of God's omnipresence (Ps. cxxxix.) the Prophet declares concerning his justice. All refuge is hopeless and ruin is inevitable. No depth of delusion nor human devices can secure the sinner from the serpent-bite of conscience here, and no mountains nor hills can hide from the presence of God hereafter. Only in Christ can refuge be found. Escape for thy life.

He contrasts Mount Carmel, which rises abruptly out of the sea, with depths of that ocean which it overhangs. Carmel was in two ways a hiding-place. 1. Through its caves (some say 1000, some 2000) with which it is perforated, whose entrance sometimes scarcely admits a single man; so close to each other that a pursuer would not discern into which the fugitive had vanished; so serpentine within, that 10 steps apart, says a traveller, we could hear each others' voices, but could not see each other. 2. Its summit, about 1800 feet above the sea, is covered with pines and oaks, and lower down with olive and laurel trees. These forests furnished hiding-places to robber-hordes at the time of our Lord. In those caves Elijah probably at times was hidden from the persecution of Ahab and Jezebel. Carmel, as the western extremity of the land, projecting into the sea, was the last place which a fugitive would reach. If he found no safety there, there was none in his whole land. Nor was there by sea [*Pusey*]

HOMILETICS.

God's Eye fixed on Sinners.—*Verse* 4.

This is a figurative expression setting forth a solemn thought. As we indicate pleasure or anger by the look of the eye, or the form of our countenance, so God

in providence fixes his "eyes over the righteous," but his "face is against them that do evil" (Ps. xxxiv. 15). 1. *In displeasure at his guilt.* God is not indifferent to human conduct. He sets his eye upon all wicked deeds, and will give them no countenance nor support. If men obstinately rebel against him, he will show his displeasure against them. "I will set my face against that man" (Ezek. xiv. 8: Lev. xx. 3; xxvi. 17). 2. *In tracking his steps.* "I will search and take them out thence." God discovers the hypocrisy and finds out the hiding-place of men. They are watched as by spies, guarded as by sentinels; hemmed in and forbidden to escape. In repose and occupation, by night and by day, alone and with others, God narrowly looks into all their paths (Job xiii. 27). 3. *In determination to punish his sin.* "For evil and not for good." The evil man is checkmated in life, followed by Nemesis, the prediction and in part the experience of justice. He flees from himself, from conscience, from God, and meets them all! His punishment is everywhere below, how then can he escape hereafter? If the eyes of Tamerlane had such power that men could hardly endure to behold them, what must the eyes of God be? If the frown of Augustus Cæsar or Queen Elizabeth was death, who can endure the anger of God? "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings" (Job xxxiv. 21, 22).

> "So writhes the mind remorse hath riven,
> Unfit for earth, undoomed for heaven,
> Darkness above, despair beneath,
> Around it flame, within it death" [*Byron*].

God's Power a Guarantee of His Truth.—*Verses* 5, 6.

These words confirm the threat in the preceding verses; describe the nature and the works of God; and present him in majesty and might, able and determined to administer justice.

I. He created the universe. "He that buildeth his stories in the heaven." 1. *He made the heavens.* He arranged them in their place and fixed them in their distance. The clouds, *the aërial* heavens, are balanced by his hand (Job xxxvii. 16). He suspends, condenses, and pours out their contents at his pleasure. *The starry* heavens derive their glory from him. *The heaven* of heavens is the palace of the Great King. Like a stately building, God has reared (artistically and beautifully put in order, arranged, Heb. xi. 3) the celestial spheres in stories one above another; the lowest, like steps, leads to the highest, the material to the spiritual, earth to heaven. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things," &c. 2. *He founded the earth.* He drew the plan and prepared the place, provided the materials and laid the foundation. "Thou hast also founded the earth," given it order, beginning, and firmness. The "*troop* in the earth," all the elements of nature and all the creatures of the world, are linked together as bands of men (2 Sam. ii. 25), or yoked in submission to his will (Is. lviii. 6). "When I call unto them they stand up together." II. He governs the universe. He sits above earth and heaven, ruling all creatures and directing all agencies. Men only see law in the evaporation of water from the sea, the electric agency which binds it in the cloud, and in the current of air which wafts it to the land. But God creates rain and disperses it over the earth. "*He* calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth." He creates the earthquake and the flood. Fire and frost, thunder and lightning, promptly obey his command. "He sendeth out his word and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow." III. He can destroy the universe. "The Lord God of Hosts, is he that toucheth the land." 1. *The ability* with which he executes his word. Threats are formidable according to the power of him that threatens. We laugh at impotence and fear omnipotence. The power which reared the world is irresistible. How hopeless the case of those who have the powers of all creation against them! "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy

wrath." 2. The *ease* with which he executes his word. He only *touches* the land and it melts; the lightness of the effort indicating the might of the power. The blast of God's breath melts the mightiest armies like wax before the fire (Ps. lxviii. 1, 2). The highest and most solid parts of the earth feel his glance. "He toucheth the hills, and they smoke." He merely breathes, and men perish (Job iv. 9). Sinai trembled; and should we be more insensible than material creation? With one touch the earth would reel before him, or return to chaos. "He uttered his voice; the earth melted." 3. The *method* in which he executes his word. He turns the land into a sea by rain or inundations; drowns it like the deluge of Noah or "the flood of Egypt." Think of the disaster in Chili in 1868. God, enthroned above, "calleth for the waters of the sea." They rise at his bid. "He pours them out upon the face of the earth," and "all that dwell therein shall mourn." The prophet wonders why men do not fear God, whose power is displayed in heaven, earth, and sea, and with a word of his mouth can melt the wicked like snow before the sun. "Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence?" &c. (Jer. v. 22).

> "How dare they, then, offend, when God shall see;
> That must alone both judge and jury be?" [*T. Randolf*]

Creation the Mirror and the Mind of God.

Men forget with whom they have to do and against whom they sin. The prophet therefore sets forth the majesty and power of God, who was able to do whatever he uttered against them. Sinners should fear to offend him, and speedily make their peace with him.

I. Creation reveals the nature of God. Every act of God is a manifestation of God; an egress of his nature. *Power* is seen in the creation and upholding of the universe in all its wonderful changes and combinations; *wisdom*, in its design and beauty, the adaptation of means to ends; *benevolence*, in its arrangements and enjoyments. Everywhere we have signs of the existence of a Being of intelligence and goodness. The heavens "declare his glory," and the earth affirms his "eternal power and Godhead." How strange to be unmindful of "goodness beyond thought, and power Divine!" Why not discern him,

> "Who plann'd, and built, and still upholds a world
> So clothed with beauty, for rebellious man?"

II. Creation reveals the mind of God. It has been called Adam's library. The prophet read the mind of God in the Book of Nature, and discovered laws for the guidance of man. 1. *The works of God subserve the purpose of God.* God is not merely present in "laws," "phenomena," or "second causes." He does not govern the world by proxy, like ancient monarchs ruling their empires. All things are made to subserve the design for which they were created, never cease to obey his will and reflect his power and goodness. The earth trembles, the floods rise, and calamities happen to fulfil the ends of his administration. 2. *The works of God reprove the indifference of man.* Israel had despised the word of God, and are directed to the ways of God, to rouse attention to his will. Sensible evidence should affect us. God teaches us by signs in heaven above and earth beneath. We should be stirred up to praise him (Prov. xvi. 4), warned of the danger of offending him, and led to fear him. If he can alter the course of nature, and turn established laws into scourges for sin, we should not rebel against him. "Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them and not build them up."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 5, 6. 1. God's name. 2. God's works — Creation and providence. 3. God's judgments—Earthquakes and floods. 4. God's design. "All that dwell therein shall mourn."

God not seen in his works. I. Great indifference exists. Men see, but do not observe. Like Hamlet's ghost, they have "no speculation in their eyes." Hence they know nothing of the grandeurs by which they are surrounded, and never rise from Nature up to Nature's God. *II. Defective knowledge abounds.* God is seen by many in his wisdom and power, acknowledged to be the Creator and Governor of the world, but not as a God of truth and justice, rewarding virtue and punishing sin. Divine perfections cannot be separated. Power is linked with holiness, and justice with truth. The Creator is the Moral Governor of the universe. To think of him at a distance, or judge of his purpose by one attribute of his being, is unreasonable. We cannot shun his presence. We only escape his anger by forsaking sin which causes it. "Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee."

Lessons. 1. God a Being of infinite perfection. 2. All things are under his control. 3. Nothing can hinder the accomplishment of his purpose. 4. It is ruinous to rebel against such a Being of almighty power and majesty. 5. It is blessed to have him for our Saviour and Friend.

"Take heed: for God holds vengeance in His hand
To hurl upon their heads that break His law."
[*Shakespeare.*]

HOMILETICS.

God's Covenant does not Invalidate His Word.—*Verses* 7, 8.

In these words Amos confirms the certainty of punishment. Israel were a sinful nation, and neither pious ancestors nor covenant relations could prevent their destruction.

I. God's covenant may be undervalued and violated. Israel professed to be God's people, and boasted of descent from holy progenitors. A noble ancestry is of no worth unless we follow their example. The piety of predecessors does not justify, but aggravates our sin. With good patterns before them men should live better. But they degenerate into heathens and idolaters. God values them no more than the most contemptible nations of the world. Their *sins* had made them like other people. The gold becomes dim; the children of Israel become children of the Ethiopians. We may boast of our election, and be esteemed by others for our profession; but if we break God's covenant, we cannot expect God's protection. What the Apostle says of circumcision applies to election. It is a benefit to none but those who keep the law (Rom. ii. 25). It will not avail us to say "Abraham is our Father," unless we do "the works of Abraham" (John viii. 39; Rom. ix. 7, 8). **II. God's special providences in fulfilling his covenant may be abused.** The plea was that God would not cast off his people; for he delivered them from bondage and pledged himself to be their God. True, God chose them that they might love him, and so long as they kept his law he protected and saved them. Special favours do not exempt from Divine justice. They lay us under greater obligation to obey; for those who have much will be punished more severely for their sins, and from them much will be required. Special deliverances may become common providences. Redemption from Egypt was no more to Israel than the leading of the Philistines and Syrians out of their former into their present dwelling-places. Those who neglect or abuse their privileges are guilty—1. Of *great ingratitude.* 2. Of *great rebellion.* When men abuse their mercies, and despise the God of mercy it is only just with him to strip them of their honours and visit their sins.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

1. *External privileges no ground for boasting before God.* Others may possess them. They may be taken from us. What was designed as a favour may lose its result by our conduct. 2. *External privileges do not preserve from degenerate conduct.* Israel lost their character and were esteemed as heathens. Conventional Christians and corrupt Churches are as bad as Infidels and Turks. 3. *External privileges are no guarantee against punishment for sin.* God accounts sin under such circumstances all the baser. Instead of hiding the guilty, such gifts abused expose them to greater condemnation. If we live not up to the obligation of God's mercies, we forfeit the honour of them.

HOMILETICS.

The Sifting Process.—*Verses* 8—10.

Punishment is again threatened, but mitigated. All shall not be destroyed. A remnant shall be sifted and preserved. But the impious and proud will be cut off with the sword.

I. The nature of the process. Like precious grain, God's people have to be purified and fitted for use. 1. It is a *violent* process. "I will sift," *i. e.* cause them to be moved, shaken, or jostled about by other nations. We have need to be shaken. We get deeply rooted in our pursuits, confirmed in our sins, and require no light measures to wean us from the world. 2. It is *an extensive* process. Israel were not to be unsettled among one nation, but many. Their life was to be spent "among *all nations*." The Jews have been found in every country of the globe almost. The whole earth in the design of God has thus become a sieve to his people. Each change in business and residence may be a sifting to preserve from sin and prepare for service. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." **II. The results of the process.** The righteous shall be saved and the wicked destroyed. 1. *The grain is preserved.* "Yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." God's eye is upon every one of his people, in their trials. Like a refiner of gold, he sits watching the process. Jewish history and Church history prove that this sifting results not in destruction, but purification. "At the present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." Not one precious seed shall be lost. "It is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones should perish." 2. *The chaff is destroyed.* "The sinners of my people shall die by the sword." The same process to one will be salvation, to another destruction. Like chaff, the wicked are worthless in their character and doom, blown away with the wind or burned in the fire (Ps. i. 4). God spares the wicked for the sake of the godly now; but a separation will come. Each will go to the place for which he is fitted and destined. "He will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 8. *The eyes of the Lord* are in every place, especially, 1. Observing sinners, 2. Scrutinizing character, and 3. dealing out justice.

Ver. 9. *I will sift.* 1. God the sifter of his people. 2. Making Divine purposes real facts. "I will command." He wills and it is done.

"When God commands, who dare oppose,
Or ask Him why, or what He does?"

God's people are sifted—1. *By God.* Abraham, the Centurion, and the Syrophenician were tried and approved. 2. *By Satan.* As Peter, saved by the prayer of Christ (Luke xxii. 31, 32). "The blast of temptation struck down

the leaves; but the root stood fast." 3. *By the world.* (*a*) Its infidelities, (*b*) Its persecutions, (*c*) Its opinions. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," &c.

"This concise prophecy contains a draught of determinate history: the kingdom, the body politic, to be destroyed from off the face of the earth; but the people, the stock, not to be destroyed. The people to be sifted through all nations; but the seed so sifted not to perish, nor its least grain to fall to the earth. It has a history made up of opposite particulars; destruction and preservation, scattering and particular custody, combined. It is the true outline of Jewish history. Is it of any other whatever?" [*Davidson on Prophecy*].

Ver. 10. *Which say.* 1. The impious spirit of sinners. Ignorant, false, confident, and presumptive. 2. The great disappointment of sinners. Their sayings do not make facts. Punishment does overtake them, suddenly and grievously. "Evil is often nearest those that put it at the greatest distance from them." Hope of impunity is only the refuge of the proud and rebellious; God by his judgments will change their verdict, and prove it to be a refuge of lies (Is. xxviii. 15). Flee to Christ, and he will be your hiding-place in the storm.

HOMILETICS.

The Fallen Tabernacle Reared and Enlarged.—*Verses* 11, 12

The book which began with dreadful judgments ends in sublime visions. The prophet has bewailed the sins of different cities and denounced the wrath of God against them. Now we find him predicting blessings for the heathen. The funeral dirge is turned into a song of mercy. The prophet is rewarded for faithful service, and is comforted with the thought, that after the destruction of ungodly elements, Divine grace shall rear, enlarge, and prosper a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. Verses 11—15 might be taken together as including the vision, but we shall treat them separately. From verses 11, 12, we get a description of the restored tabernacle.

I. The fallen tabernacle shall be reared up. "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David." 1. *Raised from its fallen condition.* It was not a magnificent palace, but "the fallen hut." It had been rent and ruined by divisions and wars. Sin will cause any kingdom to decay and any Church to fall. It impoverishes royalty, impairs human dignity, and throws into the lowest condition. But Divine grace can build up and beautify what sin has pulled down. In the human heart, the Christian Church, and the heathen world God is building up a holy temple for the perpetual residence of His Spirit (Eph. ii. 22). 2. *Repaired in its breaches.* "And close up the breaches thereof." Sin breaks down moral barriers, creates divisions in the family and the fold. God sets up new stones in the walls, heals divisions, and unites men in love and loyalty to himself. 3. *Completed in its original design.* "I will build it as in the days of old." God will finish and complete the building according to its ancient grandeur in the days of David and Solomon (2 Sam. vii. 11—16); and in harmony with his purpose. The kingdom of David is a type of the kingdom of Christ, the Son of David. The Christian Church may be reduced in circumstances, and almost ruined in prospect; but that is no reason for despair. The humble cot, the shattered tent, may be raised to greater worth and adorned with greater beauty than the temple of old. "Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time is come." II. The fallen tabernacle shall be greatly enlarged. "That they may possess the remnant of Edom," &c. Formerly the Church was confined in narrow limits, but now it shall spread itself over all nations. 1. *The Edomites*, near neighbours, yet bitter enemies, shall become peaceful citizens. 2. *The heathens*, the Gentiles, should be called. The prophet pronounced woe upon these nations at first, but now he speaks of them as called by the name of Jehovah. The most desperate and the most distant may be converted to Christ. We should be glad at the

conversion of others, and remember that the promise is unto us and our children, and as many as the Lord our God shall call. There is a bright vision for the future. God is daily increasing the number of his people. Jew and Gentile shall be called, enrolled in one family, and be distinguished by one name. "Ask of Me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

THE SPIRITUAL GLORY OF THE RAISED TABERNACLE.—*Verses* 13—15.

Behold, the days come, there are more blessings in store yet. From the fulfilment of verses 11, 12, shall result abundance of produce in the land, verse 13, great prosperity in the nation, and perpetual duration of the kingdom [*Keil*].

I. The land shall be blessed with the greatest fertility. No more curse, nor failing crops. We have in this scene—1. *Earnest activity.* The seedsman, the ploughman, and the reaper are all engaged in their special duties. 2. *Abundant crops.* So rich and productive is the land, that the mountains *drop* down sweet wine, and *all* the hills melt (Joel iii. 18). 3. *Wonderful rapidity.* The harvest lasts unto the vintage, and the vintage continues to the seed-time. There is one continuous produce, one perpetual round of toil and success. **II. The inhabitants shall enjoy the greatest privileges.** As the land of Israel shall be no more smitten with drought, so the citizens shall enjoy the rich benefits of their peaceful labour. 1. *Joy would be restored.* "I will bring again the captivity of my people." Misfortune and misery should once more be turned into prosperity. 2. *Freedom would be reclaimed.* "They shall build the waste cities." Delivered from the fear of the enemy, they are active for God. Men are captives, and only made free in Christ. In the gospel Christian Churches are chartered with liberty of worship and action. Hence they build waste places, and inhabit them with renewed blessings. 3. *The fruits of labour would be enjoyed.* Wicked men toil for others, and not for themselves. The Jews would no longer sow and others reap. They would build cities, plant vineyards, and make gardens, and enjoy the fruits of their efforts. "My servants shall build houses and inhabit them, and plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them." 4. *Perpetual security would be granted.* They would be no longer a homeless, wandering people. God would fix them, perpetually establish them in the land. When God plants, man cannot uproot or destroy. "I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and my whole soul."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 12. The restoration was not to be for themselves alone. No gifts of God end in the immediate object of his bounty and love. They were restored in order that they, the first objects of God's mercies, might win others to God; not Edom only, but all nations upon whom God says my name is called [*Pusey*].

The call of the Gentiles. 1. The call of a remnant as in Edom; so Scripture everywhere speaks of the converted as a residue. 2. The call of those specially related to God. Those who sincerely invoke his name and seek his covenanted mercy (Acts xv. 15—17).

Ver. 13. *Mountains.* Symbols of barrenness, idolatry, and difficulty of cultivation set forth the fertility and fulness of the Christian Church.

Ver. 15. 1. The *prosperity* of the Church. "I will *plant* them." 2. The *security* of the Church. "Saith the Lord thy God." 3. The *perpetuity* of the Church. "They shall *no more be pulled up*."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IX.

Vers. 1—4. *Hide themselves.* God is everywhere, not as the air is everywhere. The air is part in one place and part in another; God is all in every place. God is wholly in the height of heaven, and wholly in the depth of hell; wholly in the length of the earth, and wholly in the breadth of the sea. All God is in all things, and all God is without all things; He is without all things, and not shut out of anything. He is in all things, and not included in anything. So the ancients speak of this wonderful mystery of God's omnipresence [*Caryl*].

God's Eye—Sentences—

"Heaven hath its countless eyes to view men's acts.
Can we outrun the heavens?
However wickedness outstrips men, it has no wings to fly from God" [*Shakespeare*].

Vers. 5, 6. *Creation.* How close does it bring the Creator to us, to regard him, not so much as having *made* the world, as still engaged in *making* it; *i. e.* by supplying the life on which its laws, and thus its being and incidents, depend. "Depend upon it (says an eloquent preacher) it is not the want of greater miracles, but of the soul to perceive such as are allowed us still, that makes us push all the sanctities into the far spaces we cannot reach. The devout feel that wherever God's hand is *there* is miracle; and it is simply an undevoutness which imagines that only where miracle is, there can be the real hand of God" [*Grindon*].

Much of the glory of God in creation is hid by a train of second causes, through which few look to the *first* [*Howe*].

Ver. 7. *Ethiopians.* Inconsistency has been execrated in every age, as the assassin of religious character and peace, introducing anarchy and confusion into the repose of Christian Churches, casting stains upon garments which ought to be kept unspotted from the world, and by evil influence directly and bad example indirectly, throwing a reproach upon the cause of Christianity, and making the tongues of its enemies to blaspheme [*W. S. M.*].

"Like—but oh! how different" [*Wordsworth*].

Vers. 8—10. *Sift.* Gold in the ore is a treasure; but it is when it has passed through the refiner's hands, and has received the stamp of currency, that it becomes of acknowledged value, and fit for adaptation to all the circumstances and conveniences of life [*W. S. M.*].

Fiery trials make golden Christians; sanctified afflictions are spiritual promotion [*Dyer*].

Vers. 11—15. *Future days.* Nothing good bursts forth all at once. The lightning may dart out of a black cloud; but the day sends his bright heralds before him, to prepare the world for his coming [*Hare*].

The brightest day has not yet dawned, the widest conquests have not yet been achieved. Is not the Church challenged to nerve herself for greater effort, and to array herself in a more imposing habit? "Put on thy strength, O Zion, put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem!"

"O! scene surpassing fable, and yet true,
Scene of accomplished bliss, which who can see,
Though but in distant prospect, and not feel
His soul refreshed with foretaste of the joy?"

ON

OBADIAH.

INTRODUCTION.

This book consists only of twenty-one verses, and is the shortest in the Bible.

The Author. Obadiah (Servant of Jehovah) is a proper name frequently met with, but little is known concerning our Author. Some identify him with the pious courtier in the palace of Ahab (1 Kings xviii. 3); some with the overseer of the workmen in 2 Chron. xxxiv. 12; but the silence of Scripture is in significant contrast with the anxiety of men to know something of him.

The Time. "In all probability the prophecy was delivered between the year B.C. 588, when Jerusalem was taken by the Chaldeans, and the termination of the siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar. During this interval, that monarch subdued the Idumeans and other neighbouring nations" [*A. Elzaz*]. The contents of the book and its relation to the prophecy of Jeremiah seem to confirm this view.

The Book. "The *subjects* of the prophecy are the judgments to be inflicted upon the Idumeans on account of their wanton and cruel conduct towards the Jews at the time of the Chaldean invasion, and the restoration of the latter from captivity. The book may therefore be fitly divided into *two parts; the first* comprising verses 1—16, which contain a reprehension of the pride, self-confidence, and unfeeling cruelty of the former people, and definite predictions of their destruction; *the latter* verses 17—21, in which it is promised that the Jews should not only be restored to their own land, but possess the territories of the surrounding nations, especially Idumea" [*Elzaz*].

The style is original and fresh. "Vividness, connectedness, power, are characteristics of it. As it begins so it continues and ends. It has no breaks, nor interruptions. Thought follows on thought, as wave rolls upon wave, but all marshalled to one end, marching on, column after column, to the goal which God hath appointed for them. Each verse grows out of that which was before it, and carries on its thought. The cadence of the words in the original is a singular blending of pathos and strength. The pathos of the cadence consists in a somewhat long-sustained measure, in which the Prophet dwells on the one thought which he wishes to impress; the force, in the few brief words in which he sums up some sentence"

[*Pusey*]. "Among all the prophets," says one, "he is the briefest in number of words; in the grace of mysteries he is their equal."

"The reason why the book occupies its present unchronological position in the Hebrew Bible is supposed to be the connection between the subjects of which it treats and the mention made of 'the residue of Edom,' at the conclusion of the preceding book of Amos" [*Elzuz*] "The chronological position of Obadiah illustrates an important truth concerning God's dealings with mankind, viz. that he never executes a judgment, or inflicts a punishment, on a nation or individual, without having given some previous warning as to the hateful character and dangerous consequences of the sins for which the judgments are inflicted. He did not denounce his judgments on Nineveh by Nahum, before he had given warning to Nineveh by Jonah; and he did not denounce his judgment upon Edom by Jeremiah, before he had given warning of the approaching visitation by Obadiah" [*Wordsworth*].

OBADIAH.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Amb.**] God is represented as summoning armies and setting them in battle array, after the custom of earthly kings. **3. Clefts**] Jer. xlix. 16. See *Stanley* for description. The position, strong by nature and by art, was thought impregnable, hence their proud confidence and insolence. **4.**] *Who?* is the boast; "*thence* will *I*" is the answer. God can dislodge the highest. **5.**] Spoliation shall be complete; not such as **thieves** or **grape-gatherers** make, who leave the rest when they have had enough. **6. Hidden**] places explored; all treasures *searched out*, lit. diligent and earnest tracking out (Zeph. i. 12). **7.**] Edom would be forsaken by those in whom they put confidence. **Confederates**] Allies would drive back (brought) fugitives to the frontier. **Men at peace**] with them, neighbouring states, would deceive them (Ps. xli. 9). They that *eat bread*, lit. men of bread, their dependents, lay snares to wound. Treachery everywhere. **None**] of the wisdom and tact for which Edom was famous is left to extricate himself. **8. Wise men**] shall be bereft of discernment. **9. Thy mighty**] heroes are dismayed, or fall into despair. **10. Cause of ruin**] Violence against the seed of Jacob In different ways. **11.**] For taking a position. **Stoodest**] not as a looker-on, but as an enemy; an attitude of hostility, not sympathy. **12.**] For malicious pleasure in three forms—*looking* on with delight; **rejoiced** without reserve; boasting, **spoken proudly**, lit. to make the mouth broad or open; a gesture of contempt and derision (Ps. xxxv. 21; Is. lvii. 4: cf. Ezek. xxxv. 13, and Rev. xiii. 6). **13.**] For plundering Jerusalem. **Gate**] City (Mic. i. 9). **14.**] For seizing Judean captives, to murder them or deliver them up to the enemy. **15. For**] Resumptive from ver. 10. Righteous retribution in kind. **16.**] The greatest crime the desecration of the holy mountain by drinking carousals, for which all nations are to drink of God's wrath till utterly destroyed. **Not been**] (Job x. 19); not a trace of national existence left (Ps. xxxvii. 36; Ezek. xxvi. 21). **17.**] Yet this **Mount** shall become a sanctuary for God and his people, who will **possess**, regain their possessions. **18.**] Israel, again united and unassailed, shall execute judgment upon others. **A fire**] Numb. xxi. 28; Is. v. 24. **19.**] Extend its territory to every region under heaven. **20. Captivity**] Exiles among the Canaanites shall possess the country of the Canaanites; and those whom the Edomites had enslaved shall possess the cities of their masters. See *Lowth*. **21. Saviours**] Deliverers (see 1 Mac. v. 3—*6*); Jewish leaders and conquerors (Judges iii. 9; Is. xix. 20); or spiritually, preachers of salvation (cf. ver. 17 and Amos ix. 12). **Judge**] *i. e.* to punish (1 Sam. iii. 13). **Kingdom**] shall become universal under the Messiah (Ps. xxii. 28). "The fulfilment of vers. 17—21 can only belong to the Messianic times, and in such a way that it commenced with the founding of the kingdom of Christ on earth, advances with its extension among all nations, and will terminate in a complete fulfilment at the second coming of our Lord" [*Keil*].

HOMILETICS.

THE SOLEMN MESSAGE.—*Verses* 1, 2.

Obadiah prophesies against Edom, whose conduct towards Jacob typifies the general attitude of hostile nations to God's people, and threatens retribution for all its crimes. These verses are introductory.

I. The nature of the message. God speaks in manifold ways and divers forms to adapt his revelations to men. 1. *A vision.* God first opens their eyes, and if they have not real visions, they have fresh light and new life poured into the soul. All God's servants have heard and seen God in Christ; have enlarged views of truth and duty; and rejoice in spiritual illumination. "We speak that we know, and testify that we have seen." 2. *A report.* To impress our minds God often appeals to the senses, speaks to the eye and ear. (*a*) *A true report*, not a mere rumour originating with men; but authentic and Divine. "From the *Lord*." (*b*) *A prevalent report.* "We have *heard*." The prophet identifies others, of earlier or those of his own date, with himself. God's judgments are known in the earth by various means. Men are not kept in the dark. If the wicked despise them the righteous shall be warned. "Surely the Lord will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret to his servants the prophets." 3. *A judgment.* Those who desert God and renounce spiritual interests to gratify animal passions will be disgraced. And

when posterity indulge the spirit, perpetuate and multiply the sins, of their ancestors, as Edomites walked in the steps of Esau, then God will make an example of them. "And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom, by the hand of my people Israel." **II. The execution of the message.** God's word is not empty sound God changes not, and his servants must not alter their message. "Thus saith the Lord God concerning Edom." 1. *By an ambassador.* "An ambassador is sent." Whether this ambassador be the prophet himself, or another servant, or celestial messenger, matters little. God has agents visible and invisible. Evil spirits and wicked men are permitted to stir up nations to battle. We are ambassadors from God to beseech you to take heed and escape the judgment. 2. *By other nations.* There is first a rumour, then the ambassador, followed by the gathering of nations. Though eager to accomplish their own ends, and engrossed in their own pursuits, yet when God calls, "Arise ye," they respond, "Let us rise up against her in battle." The Medes and Persians, the Russians and Turks, are under the control of God Almighty. He can create war or cause it to cease. He has absolute dominion over the human heart, and can turn it at his pleasure. One wicked man punishes another; one sinful nation administers justice to another. "He maketh the wrath of man to praise him." **III. The consequences of this execution.** "Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen." The greatness of the calamity is set forth by its effects. 1. *Small in territory.* Edom extended from Dedan of Arabia to Bozrah in the north (Jer. xlix. 8—13). But the enemy "laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness" (Mal. i. 3). He was robbed of his dominions, and subdued by the heathen. 2. *Small in number.* They were noted for riches and power (Gen. xxxvi. 7—31); blessed with men and possessions: but were made small and sadly reduced in war (2 Kings xiv. 7). 3. *Small in honour.* Not merely despised, but "greatly despised." This mighty nation was made insignificant in itself, and despicable in the sight of others. Proud men are worthless in character, and ridiculed by inferiors. They wrongly estimate themselves, and are lightly esteemed by others. Humiliation and shame will ever be the result of their pride and defiance of God. God exalts and abases, makes great and makes small. "For lo, I will make thee small among the heathen, and despised among men."

"My pride fell with my fortunes" [*Shakespeare*].

Pride of Heart.—*Verses* 3, 4.

Edom's dwelling on the rock which seemed impregnable, fostered his pride and arrogant self-confidence. But this natural fortification afforded no shelter. God brought them down from their lofty heights, and retribution found its victims.

I. That pride of heart is deceptive. "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee." Edom imagined that they were secure in their elevated rocks—that they were out of the reach of the enemy, and that they occupied an impregnable fortress. They were deceived. National fortifications avail not against the Divine hand. 1. *Pride of heart deceives men in the commercial sphere of life.* There are godless merchants who build their nests in bright stars—pride themselves on strong financial fortifications—have a large capital, a good stock, and a fine commercial reputation. They have no need to be religious, or introduce religious sentiments in business life; they can do without it. They say, "Who shall bring me down?" God sees their pride of heart, and causes unexpected calamity to work their ruin (Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36). 2. *Pride of heart deceives men in reference to their intellectual thinkings.* Many proud thinkers reject the word of God, imagine that they are safe in the invincible battlements of logic, and their ability to resist truth and God. 3. *Pride of heart deceives men in reference to their moral safety.* Men pursue a continuous life of sin, openly blaspheme the name of God, and imagine that they are safe in the fortifications of social position and wealth. They vainly imagine that

natural qualifications and favourable circumstances will enable them to conduct life safely and well in defiance of the Great Ruler of the Universe. They are deceived. The rocky places are no refuge for the retributive providence of God. They may shield from the assaults of men, but not when God is Captain of the assailing army. **II. Pride of heart is presumptive.** "Who shall bring me down to the ground?" 1. *It presumes unduly upon the natural, temporal, and secondary advantages it may possess.* The Edomites presumed unduly upon the natural position of their city, and upon their high fortification. They trusted exclusively in these for protection against the foe. So many favoured with natural, intellectual, and social advantages of life, are glad in the enjoyment of these gifts, but their folly consists in placing undue confidence in them. The true fortifications of life are not in stones and rocks, but in love and purity of soul. 2. *It presumes ignorantly, without taking into view the access which God has to men, notwithstanding their temporal fortifications.* Edom thought only of elevated position, and not the power of God to touch them at unknown points, and by unexpected agencies. No device can avert God's retributive touch. He can send angels on his errands, who are not hindered by the battlements of men. How often do men of social position and intellectual ability—men naturally gifted—look at their own fortress unmindful of God, and become presumptuous. 3. *It presumes unwarrantably upon the inability of men to achieve its ruin.* Edom never imagined for a moment that God would interfere to work their ruin—did not see the Divine purpose in the armies coming against them, and scorned the idea of men reaching their altitudes. So men enjoy the protective advantages of life, underrate the power of their fellows, and hold in contempt the feeble instrumentalities which shall ultimately work their ruin. **III. Pride of heart is destructive.** "I will bring thee down, saith the Lord." Men who boast of human fortifications which protect them from injury are ignorant of the power of God, or vainly imagine they can elude it—make lawful things the subject of unlawful boasting—invite the scorn of men and the retribution of God. God can send darkness on the noblest intellect, distress into the most joyous home, failure into the most successful business, and will do, if pride of heart be indulged. Pride is the herald of ruin. 1. *Such men are often brought to humiliation by commercial failure.* Their best schemes fail. Their largest speculations are unsuccessful. 2. *Such men are often brought to humiliation by domestic bereavement.* Their fortifications are sealed by the stern foe Death; and the brightest lights of their homes are put out. Thus are they brought to the ground. 3. *Such men are often brought down by social slander.* Rumours get about concerning the conduct of the proud, which endanger their reputation, and bring the haughty to the dust of social execration. 4. *Such men are often brought down by death.* They shall surely be brought down from their nests in the stars, by the last great enemy of humanity. Their destruction is—1. Certain. 2. Lamentable. 3. Humiliating. 4. Unexpected. 5. Irreparable [*The Study and the Pulpit*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

1. Natural advantages often beget pride. 2. Pride leads to insolent defiance of God. 3. Insolent defiance of God leads to awful ruin.

Pride is the great enemy of God. It strikes at his throne and glory, provokes him to oppose and punish it. God resisteth (setteth himself in battle array against) the proud (Jas. iv. 6; Gen. xi. 4; cf. x. 8—10). *Pride has its root in the practical denial* of God. The proud think that there is none above them (Ps. xii. 14). *God's honour is concerned in putting down pride.* "I will bring thee down." "Æsop, when asked 'What doeth God?' said, 'He humbles the proud and exalts the humble.' And another,

> 'Whom morning's dawn beholdeth proud,
> The setting sun beholdeth bowed.'"

[*Pusey.*]

No exaltation and power can secure

those whom God in honour is concerned to bring down.

Fortifications may be constructed and made due use of, but must not be depended upon. For no fortification is too strong or too high when God is angry, and will punish. And he has various ways of bringing them into the hands of the enemies. He can cause provisions to fail; or a spark to fall in a powder magazine; water may be wanting; there may be pestilence, dysentery, or mutiny among the soldiers, or bribes may be used as scaling ladders. Then all is in vain. What the world calls protection, cannot protect against God's judgment; death mounts over all rocks [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

The Irreparable Loss.—*Verses* 5, 6.

The prophet now depicts the utter overthrow of Edom. The material wealth on which they relied shall be taken away, and nothing shall remain or be recovered.

I. Their treasures are searched out. "How are the things of Esau searched out!" The most secret places, the most hidden things, are diligently tracked out. Everything safely stored up in holes of the rock was sought after and discovered. No place can hide from God. No wealth can protect from retribution. Nothing can be concealed and kept on earth. Our best treasures are searched out, stolen by thieves or corroded by time. In the judgment day the hidden things of all men will be brought to light, every hiding-place of sin exposed, and sinners stripped of their pride and self-confidence. **II. Their treasures are taken away.** The grape-gatherer leaves some gleanings, thieves and robbers retreat with what they can carry with them: but the enemy would act much worse than ordinary plunderers. Nothing shall escape them. The devastation should be complete. A gleaning was left in Israel (Is. xvii. 6; xxiv. 13), but Edom was utterly spoiled. Treasures ensure not from the invader, aggrandize not the possessors, but become the spoil of the conqueror. Nations may trust to their defences and individuals to their wealth, but God can take them all away. "I have made Esau bare. I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself." **III. The regret at the loss is great.** "How art thou cut off!" This parenthetic sentence indicates the amazement of the prophet at the great destruction of the ungodly. Sad to see men lose reputation and happiness, the health of the body and the fortunes of the family, without the least hope of recovery. What a sight to behold men exposed to judgment, robbed of all defence, and stupefied in their sin. 1. *God pities such.* Judgment is strange work to him. He desires not the death of any sinner. O Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee! 2. *God's servants pity such.* Amos mourns over the destruction which he announces in the name of God. David and Jeremiah wept because men kept not the law. All true prophets are in sympathy with the people for whom they labour. A lost soul should cause tears to flow like rivers of water. "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this!"

Reliance on Broken Reeds.—*Verses* 7—9.

The destruction threatened could not be warded off by dependence upon allied armies, renowned wisdom, and heroic valour. Every object of confidence is destroyed. Those very projects by which they seek to protect themselves and secure their treasures become the ruin of both.

I. Human alliances disappoint. Those who forsake God often flee in vain confidence to man. But as Edom had deceived and persecuted his brother Jacob, so in turn he is deceived and punished by his friends. 1. *Confederates are worthless.* When Edom seeks for help and support from them, ambassadors and fugitives are sent back to the frontier or delivered into the hands of the enemy.

Allies will not entangle themselves in the fate of Edom. 2. *Neighbours are treacherous.* They deceive or overpower them. Men hide their malice under a pretence of peace. Their friendship is deceitful as a brook in summer, false and perfidious. Hence cried the heathen, "Friends! there is no friend to be found." The man of my peace, with whom I had no difference, in whom I trusted, proved treacherous. "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it" (Ps. lv. 12, 13). 3. *Dependents forsake them.* Those who had bread with them; those entertained by them and who lived by them, laid plots for their overthrow. While they professed to aid they secretly desired to wound them. Unkind acts from those in whom we put confidence are most severe. To spurn those from whom we derive our bread and being is the height of ingratitude and malice. "All my friends have forsaken me," cried a Prime Minister of England. "And thou, O Brutus!" said the dying Cæsar, "yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." Thus the help of man proves to be vain. When nations are united in fear, they may be severed and turned against one another. "Every experiment by multitudes or by individuals that has a sensual and selfish aim will fail," says Emerson. The giants in old time succeeded not in confederacy against the gods. The firmest friendship, the strongest armies, are broken reeds. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." **II. Worldly wisdom failed.** The prophet makes an appeal to Edom, "Shall I not?" God will turn their knowledge into ignorance, and their wisdom into folly. 1. *Wise men will be destroyed.* They will not have wit or wisdom enough to preserve themselves. A wise man, though poor, may defend a city (Prov. ix. 14, 15). A woman's wisdom defeated the purpose of Joab (2 Sam. xx. 14—22). Archimedes saved Syracuse from Roman plunder. Wisdom is better than strength, and its merits often more brilliant. Sad therefore is the loss of wise men. 2. *Wisdom itself shall perish.* "And understanding out of the mount of Esau." "Knowledge is power," and in "the multitude of counsellors there is safety." But "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord." Pharaoh's device was frustrated. Ahithophel's counsel was befooled when it was thought to be like "the oracle of God." Worldly policy is weak, begets suspicion and leads to ruin. "The best-laid schemes" are often overturned by accident, and the wisdom of legislators "made foolish" by the providence of God. Trust not to human wisdom. It can neither prevent the treachery of men, nor ward off the judgment of God. When we seek protection in "the wisdom of men," from national distress and personal evil, we shall be disappointed. "There is no understanding in them;" they are bereft of all prudence and help. "The wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid." **III. Martial valour availed not.** "Thy mighty men, O Teman! shall be dismayed." Their courage turned pale. Heroes and valiant men were cowards. Their last hope was cut off, brave warriors were dismayed and trembled in despair. If the mighty fall, what becomes of the weak? "Howl, fir-trees, if the cedars be shaken." When armies and fleets fail, the people are defenceless, and "every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter." The nation is panic-stricken, and the rigour of death strikes them helpless (Ps. lxxvi. 5). How terrible was the overthrow of Edom! Its wealth and confederacies, its renown and its valour, availed not in the day of calamity. "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 7. Edom is a type of worldly wisdom and secular policy, as well as of unbrotherly enmity to God's people. In both respects the punishment of Edom is a warning to all Machiavellian politicians in these latter days [*Wordsworth*

Ver. 8. 1. The judgment. I will "destroy the wise men." 2. The time. "In that day." 3. The certainty of it. "Saith the Lord."

Edom's destruction. 1. Its outward cause. 2. Its moral necessity in God's purpose. "The prophet sums up briefly God's end in all this. The immediate means were man's treachery, man's violence, the failure of wisdom in the wise, and of courage in the brave. The end of all in God's will, was their destruction. All things work together to good to those who love God, and to evil to those who hate him" [*Pusey*].

Understanding out of Mount of Esau. God will justly deny those understanding to keep out of the way of danger, that will not use their understanding to keep out of the way of sin. He that will be foolish, let him be foolish still [*Lange*].

1. *Carnal confidences of men.* Good situations, abundant treasures, powerful allies, prudence, and mighty men to deliver in extremity.

2. *The destruction of these confidences.* Every one is threatened, and the terror is only the forerunner of the judgment of God. "The death or disunity of the mighty often proves the death and destruction of the many; and it is in vain to depend upon mighty men for our protection, if we have not an Almighty God for us, much less if we have an Almighty God against us" [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

Unbrotherly Conduct and its Consequences.—*Verses* 10, 11.

The prophet shows the equity and the cause of the judgment pronounced against Edom. The sentence increases in severity as special sins are more aggravated in their quality. Edom was guilty of many sins, but none so great as unnatural conduct and vindictive spirit towards his brother Jacob. This violence is mentioned in general terms (ver. 10), and in particular descriptions (vers. 11—14). In vers. 10, 11 we have—

I. A brother in circumstances of distress. It was a day of calamity with Judah, calamity mentioned three times to indicate its depth (ver. 13). All are exposed to danger and distress, require sympathy and aid. "A brother is born for adversity." Three clauses form a climax. 1. *Judah's possessions were taken.* "Strangers carried away his forces," or substance. The country was probably cleared of its produce, cattle, and treasures. 2. *Judah's cities were destroyed.* "Foreigners entered into his gates." The gates were fortified and defended; yet they were carried by the enemy. The capital was taken and the temple destroyed by the Edomites (2 Esdras iv. 45). 3. *Judah's population were made captives.* "And cast lots upon Jerusalem." When the city was taken, the conquerors divided the booty, slew some of the prisoners, and took the others captive. Such distress should have excited the pity and prompted the help of the Edomites: but "in the day of Jerusalem they cried, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof." **II. Unnatural conduct towards a brother in distress.** "Thy violence against thy brother Jacob." "*Violence* includes all sorts of ill-treatment, from one with whom might is right." 1. *They took up hostile attitude towards their brother.* "Thou stoodest on the other side." Not mere spectators of the calamities of Jacob, but intensely opposed to him. There was lack of sympathy and positive cruelty. All this towards a brother, and a *twin* brother! Edom acted with the enemy, and took the contrary side to the dictates of nature; feasted his eyes with the misery, and eagerly sought the destruction of Jacob. "*Thou* wast as one of them." A man should be more affectionate towards a brother than a stranger. But often the closer the relationship the greater the cruelty. Ingratitude is always black, but doubly black in a brother. "Love as brethren." This conduct is—(1) Most reprehensible; (2) Most inhuman; (3) Most guilty. **III. Righteous punishment for unnatural conduct towards a brother in distress.** Edom helped the Babylonians

in the overthrow of Jerusalem, exulted in the downfall of Jacob, and thought to secure his own safety and prosperity. They were disappointed. God in righteous retribution visited them with the punishment they inflicted on others. Two periods of ignominy are mentioned in their history. They would suffer as a conquered people, and at length be utterly extinct. 1. *They would suffer as a conquered people.* "Shame shall cover thee." Not the shame of penitence, but the shame of dishonour. Jacob was not ruined as they expected. *They* were humbled and made contemptible, and the judgment of God confounded them for taking part against those whom they should have loved. Shame will ever be the robe and the result of social cruelty. "Let mine adversaries be clothed with shame, and let them cover themselves with their own confusion, as with a mantle." 2. *They would be cut off as a nation.* The sentence was centuries in fulfilment; but after repeated trials the end came and God cut them off. Justice without mitigation, and ruin without recovery, will come upon nations and individuals, who rejoice in a brother's affliction, and do what they can to increase it (Lev. xxii. 3). Ages abate not the force of God's word, and years change not the sinner's doom. "I will make thee perpetual desolations, and thy cities shall not return: and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

VIOLATION OF SOCIAL DUTY.—*Verses* 12—14.

These words describe what the conduct of Edom towards his brother ought to have been; and by implied contrast with his actual conduct condemns his violence, rapacity, and murder. They not only neglected social duty, but acted with inveterate cruelty

I. **In taking malicious pleasure at a brother's misfortune.** The various ways are minutely specified. 1. *With insolent looks.* "Thou shouldest not have *looked*," (*a*) *With a look of total indifference.* Distressed neighbours require relief, and we should not be unconcerned in their sorrows. The priest and the Levite looked on the wounded Samaritan and passed by. Forgetfulness of our common origin and our constant exposure to evil is another form of human hatred. (*b*) *With a look of malignant joy.* They looked with scornful eye. They looked and delighted in the affliction of Jacob. The Saviour was pained by the impudent gaze of the multitude. "They look and stare upon me." Those who make mirth at other men's misery, dishonour their nature and insult their God. This selfish cruelty is a fearful provocation (Prov. xvii. 5). "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth." 2. *In blasphemous words.* "Neither shouldest thou have *spoken* proudly." They enlarged the mouth (*margin*) with a flow of haughty words. They magnified themselves against God's people (Job xix. 5); and mocked them in sorrow. This spirit of Edom exists yet; men add insolence to pride, and affliction to affliction. Mockery of God's people is mockery to God himself. "Thus with your mouth ye have boasted against me, and have multiplied your words against me: I have heard them." 3. *In cruel acts.* (*a*) *Acts of selfishness.* (*b*) *Acts of robbery.* "Nor have laid hands on their substance." They were drawn into the cities, "entering the gate of God's people to share the conqueror's triumphant gaze on his calamity." Then they laid violent hands upon the spoil. Keep away from sin if you wish to escape it. Enter no place to enrich yourself by the prey of another, lest you be ruined yourself. Wealth, so gained, will prove like the gold of Toulouse, an evil to all that meddle with it—"A burdensome stone for all people; all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces." II. **In making common cause with the enemy.** Instead of helping their brother, they aided the enemy. 1. *By secret ambush.* They stood in the cross-way, the fork where the roads met, or narrow mountain passes, to intercept the fugitives (2 Kings xxv. 4). The Chaldeans were not so well acquainted with the ways and passes as the Edomites. Hence they took the cruel part to help the foe and seek the complete destruction of their brethren. 2. *By cruel murder.* They cut off those that escaped and delivered up all that they caught Every association with thieves and

robbers is a breach of the commandment; and those who join with others in seeking the life of man are not mere accessaries, but murderers. Paul charged the murder of Stephen upon himself. Malice in any form contains the seeds of all evil, and if not overcome by grace, will reign and ripen for destruction. Edom did not commence the war, but aided those who did, and hence were guilty of making common cause with the enemy. "Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord?" **III. This neglect of duty was at a time when there was every inducement to perform it.** "In the day of their calamity" (ver. 13). "In the day of distress." Such a time should awaken sympathy and tender feeling for our brother. To increase the burdens and conspire against the interests of men is bloodthirsty. If you cannot relieve the distressed, do not display your insolence and satiate your vengeance by increasing their misery. This is fratricidal and will bring down the judgment of Heaven. One burns with indignation at such inhumanity. God will turn the current of his wrath upon such offenders (Prov xxiv. 18).

> "This deep disgrace of brotherhood
> Touches me deeper than you can imagine" [*Shakespeare*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 12—14. *Cruelty.* They were charged with cruelty. 1. Cruelty of the *eye.* 2. Cruelty of *heart.* 3. Cruelty of *tongue.* (1) In their *anger* they spake cruelly, instigating their enemies to destroy them. (2) In their *pride* they spake insolently, expressing inward joy at their ruin, by speeches of scorn and disdain, and of triumph over them. 4. Cruelty of *hands.* Two things aggravate this cruelty of Edom. (1) Against a brother. (2) And in the time in which it was done. For a Turk to oppress a Christian, an infidel a believer, is but a trespass against humanity; for Hebrews to strive, and one Christian to afflict another, woundeth religion. Brethren by nation, brethren by religion, should live as brethren by nature; live as brethren, and our Father will be angry if we do not, and the God of peace will fight against us [*Adapted from Marbury*].

Nothing is more hateful to God than unnaturalness. "A brother is born to adversity" (Prov. xvii. 17); his birth binds him to it; and he must first offer violence to himself that is unkind to his distressed brother; he must tear the dictates of nature out of his own heart [*Trapp*].

Violence, bloodshed, unrelenting deadly hatred against the whole people, a longing for their extermination, had been inveterate characteristics of Esau. Joel and Amos had already denounced God's judgments against them for two forms of this hatred—the murder of settlers in their own land, or of those who were sold to them (Joel iii. 19; Am. i. 6; ix. 11). Obadiah warns them against yet a third—intercepting their fugitives in their escape from the more powerful enemy. *Stand not in the cross way.* Whoso puts himself in the situation to commit an old sin, does, in fact, will to renew it, and will, unless hindered from without, certainly do it. Probably he will, through sin's inherent power of growth, do worse [*Pusey*].

Sin proceeds by degrees; neither is any man at his worst at first. First they *looked* at the Church's calamity, and then they *laughed,* and then they *insulted,* and spoke big words, and then they *plundered,* and lastly they *butchered* some and imprisoned some [*Trapp*].

Ver. 12. *The day that he became a stranger.* 1. Judah (the Christian Church) chastised. Not treated as a privileged people, but as strangers, and exercised with strange lots. (1) Chastised by God. (2) Persecuted by men. 2. Judah defended. The Church may be deeply fallen and deserve to be chastised; but God undertakes for her checks the cruelty, and punishes the insolence of the enemy. God is faithful though men are unfaithful.

However wicked men walk after the lusts and passions of their own hearts,

and stick at nothing which they will, and have power to effect, yet the Lord will let them know, that they stand obliged by a law to duty, the violation whereof he will remark, aggravate, and punish; for, though Edom satisfied himself and his passion in what he did against Jacob, yet the Lord tells him, *thou shouldest not* have done thus and thus, but wast obliged by the law to do otherwise, being both a brother and a neighbour [*Hutcheson*].

"So many laws argue so many sins" [*Milton*].

HOMILETICS.

The Day of Retribution.—*Verses* 15, 16.

Another warning of judgment to come. All men are amenable to law. God notices violations of law and duty. He is present in the affairs and will administer justice on the sins of men. "For the day of the Lord is near."

I God governs men by a law of requital. Human life appears confused, but God has plan and design. The wicked may triumph and the righteous suffer, but God will rectify matters. Men may disregard and deny the day of retribution, but cannot escape it. They often suffer here in loss of property, thwarted plans, and bad repute. Look not then upon the wrath of man, but the judgment of God. 1. This retribution may be *near*. "The day of the Lord is near." 2. It is *fixed* in time. "The *day* of the Lord." 3. It is *certain*. "They shall drink." "Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord." **II. This law of retribution will be in equity.** "As thou hast done it shall be done unto thee." It is the *lex talionis*. God renders exactly to nations and individuals according to their works. Adonibezek confessed, "As I have done so God hath requited me" (Jud. i. 7). With the froward God is froward (Ps. xviii. 26); with the cruel he is strict, as with Agag and Edom. Men are filled with their own ways (Prov. xiv. 14), and reap exactly what they sow in quality and quantity. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." 1. In *personal experience*. "Thy reward shall be upon thine own head." 2. In *bitter degree*. "They shall drink and swallow down." 3. In *long duration*. "Drink continually." "His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealings shall come down upon his own pate."

"Heaven is above all, yet there sits a Judge
That no king can corrupt" [*Shakespeare*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 15. *Thy reward, &c.* 1. Then take not the law in your own hands. 2. Be encouraged in a good cause. 3. Fear in a bad cause.

Ver. 16. *As ye have drunk.* A metaphor found in Scripture and heathen writers, in allusion to the cup of poison given to criminals, or to feasts where the governor gave to each guest (John ii. 9). As God's people had drunk the cup of affliction, so must the heathen drink of it. *The cup of sorrow.* 1. To God's people—(*a*) mixed with sweetness; (*b*) it will soon be over. 2. To the wicked—(*a*) full of wrath; (*b*) will last for ever. "When God's people have drunk the red wine in the cup, the wicked must drink the dregs; the cup passeth from place to place till all be drank off."

All nations are, in the first instance, all who had been leagued against God's people; but the wide term comprehends all who, in time, become like them. It is a rule of God's justice for all times. Each in turn drank continuously, until it became as though it had never been. To swallow up, and be swallowed up in turn, is the world's history [*Pusey*].

1. The Hill of Zion God's holy mount. 2. This mount polluted by the carousals of men. 3. This mount vindicated and

purified by God. The Church may be laid waste and made desolate, but God will purify it and revenge its enemies; will make a difference between holy and unholy; punish the spoiler and defend the worshipper. "Here will I dwell, for I have a delight therein."

HOMILETICS.

The Kingdom an Asylum in Judgment.—*Verse* 17.

Mount Zion is a type of the Church of God. While heathen nations suffer in judgment it shall be restored, enlarged, and beautified. It will become the seat of empire, and God shall reign over a redeemed race for ever (vers. 17—21).

I. The Church of God is a centre of refuge. "Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance." The return of the Jews is a type of redemption. The Church of God consists of those who have fled for refuge in Christ. They are delivered from self and sin's dominion. The city of God is a sanctuary undefiled and free (Joel iii. 17). It is built upon a rock, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Its citizens are those "who have escaped of Israel," those who claim its privileges through Divine grace. "In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call." **II. The Church of God is a moral beauty.** "There shall be holiness." Physical beauty is seen in creation, moral in the Christian Church. In Christian life we see "the beauty of holiness." 1. *Holiness is promised.* "There *shall* be." God will complete his work. First, deliverance; then holiness, redemption, adornment, and service. "That we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life." 2. *Holiness should be pursued.* By this we are qualified for enjoyments on earth and in heaven. In this consists the dignity of our character and the consummation of our bliss. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." **III. The Church of God is a secure inheritance.** "The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." 1. They shall *regain their own inheritance.* Recover their possessions from the hands of Edom and Syria. 2. They shall *possess the territories of their enemies.* The world is the inheritance of the Church. "All things are yours." Ungodly nations will be judged and their dominions taken from them; but the Church will regain its privileges, enlarge its bounds, and enjoy perpetual security. "I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass; and thou shalt beat in pieces many people; and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth."

The Kingdom Regained and Enlarged.—*Verses* 18—21.

The holy land would be repossessed, and adjoining regions annexed.

I. The kingdom regained. 1. *The exiles should return.* "The captivity," prisoners of war, would be reclaimed, and wandering exiles owned as sons of Israel. 2. *The enemies would be subdued.* "There shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau." The victory of the Church is not by physical, but moral power; not by carnal, but spiritual weapons. The word of God, the gospel, like a spirit of judgment and a spirit of burning, melts the penitent and consumes the impenitent; restores the sinner and confirms the saint. Multitudes shall be converted, and truth, like an unquenchable fire, shall burn up error and superstition. Most distant tribes shall be brought to Christ, and most unlikely things shall come to pass. "For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble." **II. The kingdom enlarged.** Judah and Israel shall become one, and extend their boundaries to the four quarters of the globe. 1. *Union of the tribes.* All feuds and divisions shall cease, and Jew and Gentile become one in Christ. 2. *Conquest of other nations* (ver. 20). The prophet looks

beyond the return from captivity and conquest of Canaan. He points to the original promise (Gen. xxviii. 14). The gospel is aggressive in spirit and purpose. All nations are to be conquered, and Christ must have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. **III. The kingdom supreme.** When Israel takes possession of the border nations, judges will ascend Mount Zion to defend it and govern their enemies. The *mountains* of Esau express the idea of other lands in contrast to Zion. *To judge* means not simply to settle disputes, but to exercise dominion. Hence the kingdom will be supreme and Jehovah will declare himself to be the Ruler of the universe. His royal sceptre does not yet sway all the world. The Saviour, of whom others are only types, is still ruling his people and gaining his dominions. Soon shall his blessings extend, remote as the curse. He must reign till he hath put all things under him. Willingly or by force, they must submit. "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 18. *The flame and the stubble.* Cf. Is. v. 24; x. 17. I. *God's people like a fire.* "Jacob a fire and Joseph a flame." 1. *In their personal love to Christ.* This is the fire that he kindles in the earth. It burns upon the altar within, and like the fire of old, never goes out. "The love of Christ constraineth us." 2. *In their personal zeal for Christ.* They burn themselves, and seek to excite others to love and good works. The Psalmist and the Saviour were consumed by the zeal of their master's house. Brainerd wished to be a flame of fire in the cause of God. Basil was represented as a pillar of fire, and Latimer longed for the spark of the Spirit in the preaching of the day. II. *The wicked like stubble.* "Esau for stubble." Vital force has forsaken them. They are empty and worthless; ready for the touch of the flame. 1. In their moral character, and 2. In their moral condition. This fire shall eventually consume all hypocrisy, infidelity, and opposition. 'The light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame; and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day" (Is. x. 17, 18).

Opposers and meddlers will be destroyed. "There shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau." Persecution fans the flame. Stubble can never quench the fire. Let all enemies beware. "Our God is a consuming fire."

Ver. 21. Mount Zion. The perpetuity of the Church. Mount Zion. 1. The residence of God. 2. The seat of universal government. God the Head; Saviour's temporal and spiritual vicegerents.

God will raise up rulers for his people. These rulers judge and condemn the world, but defend and save the Church. But Jehovah is supreme, and executes his judgments by all agencies and instrumentalities. Let none contest his power, for his glory will be revealed in the defeat of his enemies and the salvation of his people. His kingdom can never be destroyed. "The Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever" (Mic. iv. 7: Ps. xciii. 97: Zech. xiv. 9).

Majestic, comprehensive simplicity of prophecy! All time and eternity, the struggles of time and the rest of eternity, are summed up in those three words; Zion and Edom retire from sight; both are comprehended in that one kingdom, and "God is all in all." The strife is ended; not that ancient strife only between the evil and the good, the oppressor and the oppressed, the subduer and the subdued; but the whole strife and disobedience of the creature towards the Creator, man against his God [*Pusey*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO THE CHAPTER.

Vers. 1, 2. The circumstances of Obadiah's country and family are designedly passed over, that we may not rest and depend upon the outward respectability of men, but derive the authority of such prophecy, and the certainty of its issues, from God alone. Preachers must be, not in name alone, but also in fact, Obadiahs, *i. e.* servants of God (1 Cor. iv. 1) [*Starke*].

Vers. 3, 4. *Pride.* God hath a special indignation at pride above all sins [*Bp Hall*]. "He that would build lastingly must lay his foundation low." When pride cometh, then cometh shame (Prov. xi. 2; xxix. 23).

"In pride, in reasoning pride, our error lies;
All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies.
Pride still is aiming at the bless'd abodes;
Men would be angels, angels would be gods."
[*Pope.*]

Vers. 5, 6. *Thieves.* Paulinus, when he was told that the Goths had sacked Nola and plundered him of all he had, lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Lord, thou knowest where I have laid up my treasure" [*Bib. Museum*].

Ver. 7. *Fickleness.* Clocks will go as they are set; but man, irregular man, is never certain [*Massinger*].

Ver. 8. Many had proved themselves wise if they had not thought themselves so [*Bp Hall*]. He that is not wise will not be taught; but there is a wisdom which multiplieth bitterness (Ecclus. xxi. 12).

"Heaven is for thee too high; be lowly wise."
[*Milton.*]

Ver. 9.

"Wherefore should not strength and might
There fail where virtue fails?" [*Milton.*]

Vers. 10—14. *Neither shouldest thou.* There is a debt of mercy and pity, of charity and compassion, of relief and succour, due to human nature, and payable from one man to another; and such as deny to pay it the distressed in the time of their abundance may justly expect it will be denied themselves in time of want [*Burkitt*]. "Be more glad to see a man's amendment than his punishment." He that is not concerned that his brother should perish, is in great danger of perishing himself [*Bp Wilson*].

Vers. 15, 16. *Retribution.* To the revengeful God will be robed in vengeance, and to the merciful he will be a God of love. Thus our own characters, whether good or bad, will be thrown back upon ourselves, with the conscious force of Divinity. What is hell but sin's *reflections* of the Divine character—the rays of the Eternal falling upon the soul through the combustible medium of the moral corruption, and thus setting all on fire? Let us remember, then, that there is to be a Divine reflection of ourselves, and that exactly *with what measure we mete, it will be measured to us again* [*Dr Thomas*].

Vers. 17—21. The earth is to come under the dominion of Christ, and is given to Him for this purpose. It is thus to Him as Canaan was to the Jews. All opposition will be as vain as it is unreasonable. His enemies shall lick the dust. The word is gone out of God's mouth and shall not return, that to Him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess [*Jay*]. We see Jerusalem emerging from her ashes and standing more beautiful than ever. From Zion goes forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, and in the Christ of the Jew all nations are blessed. The mountain of the Lord's house is established on the top of the mountains, and all people are flowing into it. In other words—just as the nations owe their conversion instrumentally to the Jews, so do they look to the Jewish Church as the heart and centre of Christian life, and seek communion with it. It is thus that the union and unity of the whole catholic Church will be consummated and perfected [*Ferguson*].

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

JONAH.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION. Jonah was the author and is the principal subject of the book which bears his name. He was the son of Amittai, born at Gath-Hepher, a village of Zebulun (2 Kings xiv. 25), and lived in the reign of Jeroboam II. In his youth he was probably contemporary with Elisha, and afterward with Hosea and Amos, prophets of the kingdom of the ten tribes. He prophesied when Israel were oppressed by Syria. "The word of Jonah to Jeroboam appears as the last sun-gleam with which Jehovah's countenance had beamed on Israel" [*Baumgarten*]. Living among the revolted tribes, testifying to their iniquity and the patience of God, he never thought of exercising his ministry among the heathen. The commission to Nineveh was a special and extraordinary event. In love with his own country and prejudiced against others, he naturally shrunk from it. (*Jonah = a dove.*) In his sentiments he is an image of the people to whom he belonged. Like him they declined to fulfil their commission to the Gentiles, but had to obey and set forth the mercy of God to the heathen world. The events of his life were not myths, but realities, and typical of the Saviour's death and resurrection, the great facts of our redemption (Matt. xii. 40 · Luke xi. 30).

The Book is a simple narrative, with the exception of (ch. ii.) a prayer or thanksgiving. This prayer contains imagery peculiar to itself, and ideas which would naturally be suggested to a Jew in danger (cf. Ps. xlii. 59). *The style* is vivid and vigorous. "It is pure and simple Hebrew, corresponding to the simplicity of the narrative and the Prophet's character. Although written in prose, it has poetic language, not in the thanksgiving only, but whenever it suits the subject. The thought of the verb is carried on by a noun formed from it. 'The men *feared* great *fear*,' &c. But in the narrative every phrase is vivid and graphic. There is not a word which does not advance the history. There is no reflection. All hastens on to the completion, and when God has given the key to the whole, the book closes, with His words of exceeding tenderness lingering in our ears" [*Pusey*]. *The design* of Jonah's mission partakes of the Christian character. For when we

see that he is sent not only to carry the tidings of the Divine judgment, but also to exemplify the grant of Divine mercy to a great heathen city; that is, to be a preacher of repentance; and that the repentance of the Ninevites through his mission brings them to know "a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenting Him of the evil" (Jonah iv. 2); without staying to discuss whether all this be a *formal type* of the *genius* of the Christian religion, it is plainly a *real example* of some of its chief properties, in the manifested efficacy of repentance, the grant of pardon, and the communication of God's mercy to the heathen world [*Davison on Prophecy*, pp. 200, 201]. The book of Jonah is like a beautiful rainbow of hope set by God's hand in the dark cloud of sin and suffering It shows that whatever judgments are executed by him on his bitterest enemies, are not consequences of any desire on his part to punish, but are due to their sins, evoking and arming the Divine justice against themselves [*Wordsworth*].

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **And** (now)] a continuation of the Hebrew writings, not an independent part. **2. That**] Heb. the city, the great, the art, a demonstrative force. **Nineveh**] Cf. Gen. x. 11, *Smith's* Bib. Dict. **Arise**] A term of excitement. **3. Tarshish**] Tartessus in Spain; others, Carthage; probably Tarsus in Cilicia. **Presence**] Lit. from being in the presence, *i. e.* from standing in the presence of the Lord as His servant and minister (cf. Gen. iv. 16: Deut. x. 8). **Joppa**] Now Jaffa. **4. Sent out**] Lit. to cast or hurl, passive, to be thrown prostrate. "God throws the wind down upon the surface of the sea." "Hurled a greate wynde into the see" [*Coverd.*]. **Was like**] Lit. thought to be broken. The ship personified; ship and crew identified in the writer's mind. **5 Afraid**] Though accustomed to storms. **Lighten**] The sailors and ship under a burden. **Fast**] A heavy sleep, from a word to snore. **6. What**] He sleeps, they pray (Ps. cvii. 28). **God**] Lit. *the* God; other gods powerless (*perhaps* the language of hope); Jonah's God could help them. **7. Lots**] A heathen mode of decision, often permitted by God. "Lots were for (1) dividing; (2) consulting; (3) divining" [*Pusey*]. **Fell upon**] Prov. xvi. 33. **8. Tell**] How urgent and earnest this examination! Fit questions for our own hearts! **9. Hebrew**] A name by which an Israelite was known to foreigners (Gen. xl. 15: Ex. iii. 18). **The God**] Heathens had distinct gods for heaven, earth, and sea. **10. Afraid**] They had heard of, now they felt the power of Jehovah. **11. The Sea**] "Not only increasingly tempestuous, but, like a thing alive and obeying its Master's will, it was holding on its course, its wild waves tossing themselves and marching on in battalions arrayed for the end for which they were sent, pursuing and demanding the runaway slave of God" [*Pusey*]. **12.**] Jonah reads out his doom, conscious of being the cause of suffering and peril. **Cast me**] Suicide and guilt to have done it himself. **I know**] *i. e.* am well aware. **13. Rowed hard**] Lit. dug, intense effort with the oars; hence "ploughed the main" [*Pusey*]. **14. Beseech**] Repetitions which indicate earnestness and a sense of dependence. **15. Ceased**] Lit. stood hushed immediately, and like a servant obeyed its commander (Job xxxviii. 11). **16. Offered**] present sacrifice; and vowed more when they landed. **17. Fish**] Sea-monster (Gen. i. 21: Job vii. 12: Ps. lxxiv. 13); a whale (Matt. xii. 40). The fact divinely attested. Independent of this there is no improbability in the swallowing up of Jonah. Sharks swallow and retain a grown man in their stomach, and follow vessels many days for what may be thrown overboard. **Three**] Significant time! "A hidden prophecy." The miracle is justified by the end in view, to chastise and recover a disobedient prophet, to shadow forth the greater miracle of one laying down his life and taking it up again for us.

HOMILETICS.

THE GREAT COMMISSION.—*Verses* 1, 2.

"*The word*" came suddenly, unexpectedly, and authoritatively to Jonah. He thought of quietly remaining in his own land. For ages God had confined his revelations to Israel. But he is the Ruler of all nations. His kingdom is not local and geographical like the gods of the heathens. Among the Gentiles the gospel must be preached (Rom. iii. 28); and Jonah is sent to the most renowned city of the Gentile world.

I. The commission of Jonah. "Go to Nineveh, that great city." 1. *It was sovereign.* The word came to Jonah, apparently the most unlikely for the work. God elects his own agents, appoints their duty and their place, and gives no account of his matters to us. Some have more work to do and more honour than others. Let all be content in their sphere, instead of longing for greater distinction and condemning the less privileged. Greater service would bring greater responsibility, and greater failure greater condemnation. God gives to every one according to his ability, and in sovereign authority demands implicit obedience. "Arise, go." 2. *It was arduous.* There was great danger. Jonah might be ridiculed. It was a new and unheard-of enterprise. Nineveh was great in pride and splendour, wealth and population. For centuries it had been growing in power and population. The monarchs of Assyria had filled it with the spoils of empires. It had no equal, and sat as a queen in splendour. Nahum predicted the destruction

of the city from a distance, but Jonah must go *into* it. It requires self-denial to go as a missionary to heathens now, with higher civilization and greater advantages. Jonah's mission was more difficult and trying. Social relations and selfish pursuits must give way to every command of God. 3. *It was clear.* Though brief and without explanation, the call was definite. With military precision the word is uttered—"Go;" the field is revealed—"Nineveh;" and obedience is expected—"Arise." The word often comes to us with positive demands upon our time and purse. There has been no doubt or uncertainty. Let us feel its convincing and confirming power. 4. *It was urgent. Arise.* Delay strengthens doubt and increases difficulty Carnal reasoning and natural reluctance have few better counsellors than procrastination. If we loiter, we may desert the duty, and the enemy be encouraged to tempt again. *Go*—the city is exposed to judgment, and men may perish. The King's business requires haste. "*Run*, speak to that young man." **II. The reason for Jonah's commission.** "For the wickedness," &c. 1. *Great cities are often filled with wickedness.* Power gives license and custom begets authority. Examples are pernicious, and evil communications corrupt good manners. Nineveh was filled with pride and alienated from God. She oppressed the poor and helpless (Jon. iii. 8: Nah. iii. 1—3). Blood and robbery, idolatry and witchcraft, stained her glory. "She drew not near to God." Are our great cities and towns free from luxury and pomp, irreligion and injustice? 2. *God sees the wickedness of great cities.* They are not too great for the omniscient eye of the Great Judge. All sins go up before him, and are registered for judgment in his book of remembrance. Enormous guilt *cries* like the blood of Abel for interference. God specially takes cognizance of places above human restraint, and manifests holy indignation at their wickedness. Sodom and Gomorrah, Babylon and unburied Nineveh, are warnings to this generation. 3. *The wickedness of great cities must be exposed.* "Cry against it." Individuals cannot hide themselves in communities, nor cities throw their responsibility upon nations. Every sin is searched out, found, and reproved. Jonah was not to go and teach philosophy, palliate, or compromise with sin, but to cry *against* it. Denounce the idolatry and predict the ruin of Nineveh. With intense feeling and earnestness he must give the alarm; proclaim with the voice of the herald the danger. "Many people cannot *cry*; they have not force of soul; they are not endowed for extreme effort," says one. We must wink at no sin; expose drunkenness and profligacy; with lip and life, amid insult and indifference, cry aloud and spare not. God may conceal the danger of our duty, and touch our most sensitive feelings to test our faith and discipline our hearts, but never flee away, lest he punish you. "Fear not; certainly I will be with thee."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

The word. This phrase seems to represent the "word of the Lord," as an atmosphere of kindling holy thought, a sphere of spiritual truth encompassing the Prophet, illuminating and moving his whole soul, and finally taking shape in language of exhortation, or prediction, or teaching, or resolve, as the case might be [*Liddon*].

Wickedness. God is brought before us in these words as he sits above this waterflood of crime, as he remaineth in the moral world, a King for ever. He is the Great Judge, unseen by man, but witnessing all human acts, and words, and motives; seated now upon his throne of judgment: and each crime of each member of that vast community mounts upwards, and is registered in his heavenly court [*Wordsworth*].

Let us call on our souls, when plain duty is before us, to *arise* and go about it: *speedily*, if we do not wish Satan to stop us from it (1 Sam. xxi. 8: Ps. cxix. 60); *heartily*, if we desire God to accept our service (Ecc. ix. 10); and *cheerfully*, if we would have comfort in doing it (Rom. xii. 8). Jonah was called to *immediate* and *hearty* service. Such should be our obedience to every command of our Divine Master [*Sibthorp*].

HOMILETICS.

THE DISGRACEFUL FLIGHT.—*Verse* 3.

Jonah arose but to depart from duty. He might be influenced by fear, indolence, and unbelief. But the chief reason for his flight seems to be intense love for his own, and deep hatred to a heathen country. He was reluctant to offer mercy to Nineveh, and desired its destruction as an enemy. Whatever leads to prejudice blinds the mind, sours the temper, and degrades the man of God.

I. **Flight from duty is not departure from God's control.** Jonah believed in the Divine omnipresence (Ps. cxxxix. 7, 12), did not cast off all regard for God but sought to relieve himself of duty by quitting the land of light and religious ordinances. He did not expect to go where God was not, but where God would let him alone. His creed was better than his conduct. He left the field of action for the place of retirement. Many are of Jonah's temper, try his experiment, and feel the presence of God too painful for them. A scholar leaves the Sabbath school to avoid the contact of truth with conscience. A young man brought up under religious influence quits home and native country. An ungodly man feels miserable, shuns godly company, and stifles impressions by fleeing into business, worldly society, and amusements. The believer knows his duty, but will not do it. Such efforts often succeed in spite of the restraints of providence and the voice of conscience. But fear gets hold of men at length, God meets them in the way, and it is impossible to escape. "Lo, they that be far from thee shall perish." II. **Favourable circumstances in departing from God do not always lead to a successful issue.** Circumstances favoured Jonah's design, and gave him an opportunity of escape. "He found a ship going to Tarshish." The vessel quickly sailed. Jonah thought he was leaving his trouble by leaving his native shore, but vain hope (Amos ix. 2—4 : Is. ii. 19—22 : Jer. xvi. 16—21). "The ready way is not always the right way," says an old author. The greatest hurry the least speed in a path of disobedience. The worst plans may prosper for a time, but such prosperity ends in storms and darkness. Talk not of Providence in an evil course—say not when tempted that you are tempted of God. God might miraculously interfere with men's conduct, but this would change the government of the world, render our probation useless, and afford no opportunity for human action and Divine justice. If he thwart the ways of selfish men, you hear no more of Providence. Departure from God is departure from his love and protection—from Divine dignity and unbounded bliss. Follow the directions of the word, and you will enjoy the leadings of Providence. "The Lord meeteth him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness." III. **Departure from God is more expensive than obedience to God.** Jonah paid the fare, like many who scruple not to spend their money on selfish projects, but withhold from the cause of God. Sin is always expensive, and draws upon our purse and time. Sinners pay their fare, 1. *In bitter experience.* There is peace in pleasing God, but conscious opposition to him brings an uneasy mind. Jonah could not stay at home. Everything reminded him of God and duty, and such thoughts are painful. Men seek a new country, try fresh experiments, to drown the warnings of conscience, but do not succeed. 2. *In moral loss.* The loss of Divine favour and a servant's dignity. The Sabbath-breaker, the pleasure-seeker, and the drunkard, pay their fare. Blasted prospects, shattered constitutions, and ruined families indicate the awful price of sin. The pleasures of sin are dearly bought, never last, and always bring disappointment.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Jonah's disobedience. 1. It was *foolish;* for he took the difficulties of life into his own hands. 2. It was *wilful.* He deliberately paid his money.

3. It was *ungrateful*; for he refused the honour of the commission. 4. It was *continuous*. 5. It was *criminal* [Adapted from *Exell*].

There is in the conduct of Jonah a twofold sin,—disobedience to God and flight from God. What God appoints thee to do, do without gainsaying. He who gives the burden, gives the shoulders to bear it. He who flees increases the burden and commits folly [*Lange*].

> Take the task he gives you gladly,
> Let his work your pleasure be;
> Answer quickly when he calleth,
> "Here am I, send me, send me!"

Step by step the disobedient prophet takes in consummation of his purpose, and each following fast on the back of its predecessor, without repentance and as it would almost seem, without reflection. (1) He "rose up to flee." (2) He "went to Joppa." (3) He "found a ship." (4) He "paid the fare." (5) He "went down into it." The words are like relentless, consecutive, fast-falling blows, under which his whole character as an obedient man of God is beaten to death and trampled under-foot of Satan [*Hugh Martin*].

Man's own wisdom is a worthless guide. He is often more diligent in working his ruin than in seeking his salvation.

HOMILETICS.

The Retributive Storm.—*Verses* 4, 5.

Sin is not only an expensive pleasure, but a disturbing element. In the human heart, the domestic circle, and the Christian Church, it creates storms. Some are permitted to escape from God, not so Jonah. Perverse and self-willed as he may be, God's grace abounds. God sends a messenger to recover him.

I. The storm and its lessons. Learn—1. *The operations of nature are under Divine control.* (1) *In their origin.* It is distinctly said, "the *Lord* sent out a great wind." Nature is created and dependent; has neither force nor will of her own. All the elements are God's messengers and obey him (Ps. cxlvii. 15—18). Mark the perfect *ease* and mighty power displayed. He wills, he speaks, and calm and tempest, sunshine and shower, are cast forth upon us (Gen. i. 3: Job xxxvii. 1—7). When we expect rest, lo, a messenger to rouse us to a sense of danger! "Winds and tempests fulfil his pleasure." (2) *In their strength.* "A *mighty* tempest fell upon Jonah." Storms often swept that sea, were known by special names, as Euroclydon off Crete, but none like this. God gives force to matter and motion to winds. He whispers in the breeze and thunders in the hurricane; he gives strength to the floods and direction to the storm. Regularity does not exclude supreme and personal control. The sudden change in the financial weather which melts our fortune like ice before the spring-time—the rains which frustrate our plans, and the clouds that enter our dwellings, are sent by God. "For he *commandeth* and *raiseth* the stormy wind which lifteth up the waves thereof." 2. *The operations of nature are moral in their design.* The wind was sent *after* Jonah and fell upon him. It had a special end, a moral design. God is accomplishing many purposes in daily providence. By the same process he can punish the sinner and reclaim the backslider. We may see mischief in the storm. One thing may engross our attention, but nothing deranges God's design. Individual circumstances are adapted to individual character, and national calamities to national morality. The elements are messengers of mercy and judgment. Fire and water, wind and malaria, are sent to reach the disobedient. Fugitives from God will be caught in their transgression. It is better to be recovered by a tempest than perish in a calm. **II. The storm and its effects.** God's efforts are not powerless. Nature roused to fury speaks with no small voice. 1. *Its effect upon the ship.* "The ship was like to be broken." Often had it ploughed the sea, but never tossed about as then. What are works of man when seized by the hand of God? Who can contend with the Almighty? Our merchant fleet and men of war are

helpless in the raging of the sea. It is needful for all, especially for those who do business on great waters, to own dependence upon God and thank him for a prosperous voyage. 2. *Its effect upon the mariners.* (1) They *feared.* "The mariners were afraid." Men of careless and jovial spirit matured in peril, trembled in fear. God can damp the most buoyant spirit and rouse the most secure. (2) They *prayed.* "And cried each to his God." Perhaps of different nations each had his favourite idol. They were sensible men, knew that their own power and wisdom would not avail in that tempest. Prayer is a law of our constitution and the most sensible part of our conduct. But many do not pray until they get on the sea. In a calm they forget God; in a storm, alarmed by danger, roused by affliction, they feel conscious of sin, and cry to God for help. But better late than never. When forced to feel that we cannot flee from God, it may be acceptable to return in prayer to him (Ps. cvii.). "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them." (3) They *cast out their wares.* God's purpose does not excuse man's neglect. Men risk life sometimes to get wealth; but when life is in danger they will part with the most valuable treasures to keep it. "All that a man hath will he give for his life." Spiritually we should be anxious to save the soul. Every besetting sin in the race, every cumber in the voyage, must be cast away. Worldly cares and pursuits which endanger the soul and raise the anger of God must be forsaken. The crew with Paul threw overboard all the merchandise. Lay aside all encumbrance. Life is more value than cargo. Forsake all sin, and you will pray with greater speed than Jonah's mariners. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Fear brings many recruits into the army of Christ, who afterwards fight under his banner from *love* of his service. The cry of sorrow often turns into the pleading of true contrition and filial dependence (Acts xvi. 27—34: Is. xxvi. 16—18). To his grace be the glory. It is well to find these heathen sailors not sunk into a stupid insensibility, nor bewildered with extreme terror, two common effects of imminent danger on bold and irreligious minds, especially in *their* profession. But one thing alone gives true peace in danger: assurance of God's love (2 Cor. v. 5—8). Do we *enjoy* it? do we *seek* it [*Sibthorp*]?

In the prayer of the mariners notice, 1. The *light of nature* which instructed them to recognize a Supreme Being. 2. The *power of conscience* to hear him speak in anger in the storm. 3. The *impotence of idolatry* in distress. Their prayers were earnest, though ignorant. But we learn that the deities of pagan lands and sentimental religionists are deaf and dumb like the gods of Baal. "The natural light of reason extends thus far, that it considers God kind, gracious, merciful, and mild. This is a great light; but it fails in two particulars. In the *first* place, it believes that God has power and knowledge to do and to give; but that he is willing also to do such things for it, it knows not; therefore it does not continue steadfast in its opinion. In the *second* place, reason cannot correctly bestow the predicate of Deity upon that being to whom it belongs. It knows that God is; but who and what he is who has a right to be called God it knows not" [*Lange*].—

HOMILETICS.

Contrasts in the Voyage of Life.—*Verse* 5.

Fatigue and sorrow had some influence upon Jonah (Matt. xxvi. 40—45); but he seemed to be stupefied by sin, and for a time composed himself into deep sleep. The praying sailors and the sleeping servant indicate great contrasts in moral life.

I. Contrasts in the family. Diligent and idle, godly and ungodly children Some pray, and others live regardless of God. The parents are asleep when they ought to be alive to every duty, and set an example to their converted children. Children are careless when mothers and fathers continually pray for them. **II. Contrasts in the Christian Church.** Many Christians are active and energetic, praying for the Holy Spirit and the revival of God's work: others murmur and do little or nothing. They are asleep in Zion. **III. Contrasts in the world.** We have Pagan piety reproving Christian indifference; Roman Catholic and ritualistic zeal shaming Protestant faith; heathens and Mohammedans provoking us to good works. "Let us not sleep as do others."

THE SLEEPER ROUSED.—*Verse* 6.

God had other messengers beside wind and storm. He often uses rough and uncouth means, very unlikely instruments. It was not a pious minister, but a wicked woman, who rebuked Bunyan for his profanity. Jonah was roused, not by a prophet of God, but a heathen captain, who suffered no one in common danger to desert his duty or hinder others from performing it. "What meanest thou?" &c.

I. "What meanest thou?" It is most unreasonable to sleep. The bird, the beast, and the insect, know their own interest better; flee from danger, and prepare for coming difficulty (Is. i. 3: Prov. vi. 5—11: Jer. viii. 7). Surely intelligent beings, Christian believers, may learn much from animal creation. **II. "What meanest thou?" It is most risky to sleep.** The ship is in danger of sinking. Thy own life and the lives of others are at stake. All hands must be at work. It is no time for sleep when the house is on fire. We should never sleep in self-security when men are perishing around us. **III. "What meanest thou?" when others are asking thy prayers.** Every man is longing for deliverance. 1. *Asked by those who have prayed to their gods in vain.* Each has looked to his idol, and depended upon resources which have disappointed. Men turn to you in penitence and bitter experience, and ask an interest in your prayers. Intercessory prayer is genuine charity. 2. *Asked by those who believe that your God can help.* The ship-master was convinced that Jonah's God might possibly be more powerful than any of the gods of the crew. This is the language of hope and earnestness. "*Perhaps* God may think upon us." The faith of awakened sinners should reprove our unbelief and neglect. We come not to a God unknown and unrevealed. There is more than "perhaps" upon which to ground our faith. We have warrant to pray, for God will hear; we are roused by circumstances around us to call upon our God in personal united supplication. "Let us not sleep as do others."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 5. Jonah was in a deep sleep, a sleep by which he was fast held and bound; a sleep as deep as that from which Sisera never woke. (The same Heb. word is used, Judg. iv. 21.) Had God allowed the ship to sink, the memory of Jonah would have been that of a fugitive prophet. As it is, his deep sleep stands as an image of the lethargy of sin [*Pusey*].

1. A child of God may so miscarry through infirmity, negligence, and temptation, that he may be blameworthy and reprovable by a Pagan in the light of nature. 2. It is deeply censurable and absurd even to the eye of nature to be secure in trouble. 3. Nature's light will acknowledge that he who is the true God hath power to deliver in extreme danger [*Hutcheson*].

Ver. 6. *What meanest thou?* Apply the words to the sinner. *I. The condition indicated.* Sleep a state of—1. Darkness; 2. Danger; 3. Insensibility; 4. and Death. Yet the awful condition of many. The anger of God is upon them. Death and judgment are drawing nigh. Yet they sleep on, wish not to be disturbed and roused to a consciousness of danger. *II. The question*

pressed. "What meanest thou?" To avoid the danger and run away from God? Is sleep better than anxiety, and sin than salvation? Do you mean to sleep as long as God and man will let you, and then just when the ship is sinking try to save yourselves? Will you rob God of your love and obedience, and expect him to interpose at last to save you? "What meanest thou?" "Awake, thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light."

We see in this instance the great danger in which unconscious sinners are often involved—that the solace sought by them often departs from them—that a deep sleep remains, and that in the performance of duty the godly are sometimes more slothful than the ungodly [*Lange*].

A salutary admonition, from whatever quarter it may come, ought never to be despised [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

Is there not a Cause?—*Verse* 7.

When great judgments happen there must be great guilt. When a nation, city, or family is brought into danger, it is wise to inquire into the cause. Here we notice—

I. Social danger caused by individual sin. Nature teaches a connection between sin and suffering. They are bound together under God's government. The connection is not casual. All misery is the result of sin. But while each individual stands for himself, he is also related to others. Nations suffer for the sins of rulers; families, for the sins of parents; and the crew for the sins of its passenger. "This man perished not alone in his iniquity." **II. Social danger prompting social sympathy.** "They said one to another, Come." Great calamity begets great sympathy. Common sufferings knit kindred feelings and hearts in one. "There was no independent member, no mutinous spirit amongst the crew," says Mr Exell; "no one suggested another way of relief; all, as though animated by one common impulse, at once accept this test of innocence." **III. Social danger removed by the providence of God.** "Nature forces on our heart a Creator, history a providence," says Richter. In this narrative we discern the power of God over the elements of nature and the destinies of men. 1. *Providence over the phenomena of nature.* The storm—no ordinary one—was traced to a cause. The mariners, though not true believers, were not atheists. Their gods could do nothing; perhaps Jonah's God could help them, whom they called "*the God.*" Jonah is reproved for want of devotion to him and lackness of duty to his fellow-passengers in peril. Among heathen nations there was a general admission of one supreme ruler over earth and sea; a remnant of the primitive knowledge by which Jehovah left not himself without a witness. 2. *Providence over the conduct of men.* There must be a cause for this evil; they must find it out, and if possible remove it. They believe some one is guilty, and do not expect that the culprit will tell of himself. They appeal to the higher power, in the only way they know, by lot. The *evil* is thought of, and not so much the storm. Behind natural phenomena, law, sequence, or cause, they discern moral designs. Man cannot escape his God—(*a*) *In discovering their guilt.* Jonah expected to escape, but was found out and his guilt made known. No darkness nor distance can hide the sinner. Murder will out; and it is true in a measure with all sin. Sin tries to deceive with secrecy and then betrays to others. "There is nothing that shall not be revealed." "God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing." (*b*) *In deciding their destiny.* No event can escape the eye of God, and no step in life be taken without his permission. God overruled the lot, and it fell upon Jonah. How completely are we in the hands of God. Believers trying to forget neglect of duty, and unbelievers refusing to follow Christ, can hide nothing from his all-searching eye. "My times are in thy hand." "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."

CASTING LOTS.—*Verse* 7.

The mariners have now recourse to other means of safety than their exertions or prayers.—Observe in their conduct, *First, both the power and defectiveness of conscience.* They saw themselves deserving of Divine anger; yet each thought himself less guilty than his fellow. The lanthorn light of conscience in a natural man, gives a general view of some prominent truths sufficient to cause him to pass sentence of condemnation on himself, but it searches not the soul's recesses, so as to show sin in its extent and sinfulness. Ignorance and pride are impenetrable, and *these effects* are produced by the powerful aid of the Spirit. When that shines into the soul, a man will make St Paul's confession his own. *Secondly, the light of nature.* As conscience shined inwardly, so this outwardly, testifying to a connection between guilt and punishment (Acts xxviii. 4). They saw in the tempest an extraordinary judgment, and surmised (rightly) an extraordinary cause. Perhaps herein the light of nature was aided by that of tradition and some faint glimmerings of Scriptural truth. We are very slow to admit a connection between sin and suffering. We are apt to lay the blame of the latter anywhere but where it should be, on our own transgressions. *Thirdly, the influence of superstition.* Lots have sometimes been used by Divine appointment. Here is a far less clear warrant for them. Yet we may admit some right principle among these sailors, of referring to a higher Being what seemed beyond the reach of human knowledge to decide. But among the heathen Satan abused them (as other things of a similar kind, such as divination) to an execrable superstition, and the establishment of his own dominion (Esth. iii. 7: Ezek. xxi. 21: Is. xx. 3). Both in ancient and modern times they have been abused to serve the avarice and evil passions of men, and have proved the source of misery, contention, and bloodshed (Joel iii. 3: Obad. 11: John xix. 23). *We* are seldom if ever warranted to have recourse to lots. We have a full and sufficient guide in the Scriptures, and can never be justified in using *this* guide, as some do, in the way of a lottery [*Sibthorp*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

This evil. Suffering, penal and social.

Guilt disowned and discovered in the lot. "In this procedure, there are two things to be attended to:—*First*, the fact that each man by making this proposal and going into it disowns the guilt: and *second*, the method by which they propose to discover it [*Martin*].

Upon Jonah. 1. Who is to be *pitied* for his guilt and humiliation. 2. *Rejoiced over*, because stopped in his wandering from God and about to be restored.

God's controversy is sometimes greater with his people and more severely prosecuted than against Pagans and gross idolaters. For—1. Rebellion is idolatry (1 Sam. xv. 23), and so much the grosser as it is in a child. 2. Though they worshipped that which was no god, yet none of them had so behaved towards a *supposed* Deity, as he had done towards the *true* God. 3. God may *wink* at sins in Pagans, but will not let his own children go on unreclaimed (Am. iii. 2), it being mercy to pursue them for their folly and amend them [*Hutcheson*].

HOMILETICS.

URGENT QUESTIONS.—*Verse* 8.

Most admirable is the dealing of these heathens with the prophet of God. They are in great danger, but press not his ruin; do not condemn him without opportunity to clear himself. They inquire concerning him—(*a*) mildly, (*b*) minutely, (*c*) briefly, and (*d*) urgently. Their patience was greater than many Christians would have displayed in similar circumstances.

I. Apply the questions to Jonah. "These questions must have gone home to

Jonah's conscience. *What* is thy *business?* The office of a prophet which he had left. *Whence comest thou?* From standing before God as his minister. *What thy country?* Of *what people* art *thou?* The people of God whom he had quitted for heathen; not to win them to God, as he commanded; but not knowing what they did to abet him in his flight" [*Pusey*]. **II. Apply the questions to ourselves.** Pause amid the excitements, hurry, and concerns of life, and ask what is our present *business*—the work of God, or the service of Satan? What our *country*—the world, or the kingdom of Christ? Are we content with earth, or do we seek "a better country"? Of what *people?* Of the people of God, or those living without God? Some live in holiness and others in sin; some by faith and others by sense. Whom dost thou join now, for they are thine, and with them thou shalt have thy portion? And *whence comest thou?* Trace thy origin from God as a holy being, from thy parents as born in sin. If saved, thou comest out of darkness into light, from the power of Satan unto God. But *whither goest thou?* What is your *aim*, and what will be the *end* of your life?

CONFESSION OF FAITH AND OF GUILT.—*Verses* 9, 10.

I. Jonah confesses his faith. A confession as unreserved as his guilt was aggravating. 1. *He was a Hebrew.* A name designating Abraham's descendants, and indicating great privileges and advantages. One of the peculiar people. We have been adopted into Israel's position. To us belong the oracles of God. Our sins are more dishonouring to God than those of Pagans. 2. *He was a servant of God.* "I fear Jehovah." He distinctly avows his religion besides his nationality. He thus confirms the light and condemns the practice of the sailors; candidly confesses his own guilt, and puts to shame many professors, who hide their light and disown their Master. He *feared;* though his conduct belied his profession, yet he reverently feared and worshipped Jehovah. (1) *His God was the Creator of heaven and earth.* He exalts him above the local deities of heaven, sea, and land; directs the mariners' thoughts from their own lying vanities to the living and true God. His God did not partition the universe into provinces, but governed all things and could help them in the storm. (2) *His God was Jehovah.* The great and significant name by which God (according to his own use of it) revealed Himself as the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God of a chosen people. One God and only One, Maker and Ruler of the universe; Guide and Saviour of men. Thus he invites all to come and put their trust under the shadow of his wing (Ex. vi. 2—8: Ps. lxviii. 4: Rom. iii. 1, 2). **II. Jonah confesses his guilt.** What a change in the prophet. 1. He makes a *bold* confession. He shrank from distant danger at first, now lays himself open to reproach, contempt, and death. 2. He makes a *full* confession. He has no reserve, but severely condemns himself in the presence of the crew. "It is easy to keep the flag up when it is nailed to the mast; but to hoist it in the face of the enemy after we have been sailing with him, yard-arm and yard-arm, under false colours, is hard—so hard that many surrender—are long led captive by Satan at his will, and delivered only through severe affliction or deep disgrace." 3. He made a *difficult* confession. He had neglected his duty and hid his religion; he had refused to help the crew and told them that he was in conflict with Jehovah; that his conduct was wicked, not a revolt against the arbitrary rule of a local divinity, but against his Maker and theirs, and had involved them in contest with his infinite power and truth. This was hard, but he did it, and proved the sincerity of his penitence and the reality of God's gracious work in his heart. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God: which made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever."

AGGRAVATIONS OF THE GUILT OF BACKSLIDING.—*Verses* 9. 10.

Are you a true worshipper and servant of God? Are you like Jonah overtaken

by Divine displeasure in a course of disobedience? And are you at last humbled to own your guilt? Then you will acknowledge these three things in the exceeding sinfulness of your sin—the three elements which appear in the guilt of Jonah and expressly owned by himself. 1. *Against what God is in himself.* Jonah owns that he has sinned; against "Jehovah, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land." 2. *Against what God has been to him.* Jonah confesses that he has sinned; "I am an Hebrew:" a member of the people whose God Jehovah is, for whom Jehovah hath done great things; to whom he hath given "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the law, and the service of God, and the promises, whose are the fathers," &c. 3. *Against what he himself has been to God.* Jonah owns that he had sinned: "I fear Jehovah;" I am one of his servants; I have been enrolled among the true Israel—a true child of the covenant—a messenger of it also, standing in the counsel and in the secret of the Most High; for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." By all these three considerations Jonah ought to have been restrained from sinning and retained in his loyalty to God. The glory of God—the God of heaven, of the sea, and of the dry land—ought to have restrained him. The graciousness of God towards himself ought to have restrained him. And the grace of God in himself ought to have restrained him. And when, in the face of all these three considerations, his disobedience breaks forth and carries him impetuously away, do they not all go to aggravate the guilt which he contracts [*Hugh Martin*]?

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 8. Public insight into private life [*Exell*].

Ver. 10. *Feared.* By receiving Jonah, they had opposed God, whose power and supremacy they now perceived. Notice that God glorifies himself above idols, and often constrains men to render homage,—that the more men see of God's judgments for sin, the more they should fear him; that "such fear is the beginning of conversion, when men turn from dwelling on the distresses which surround them to God who sent them."

Why hast thou done this? 1. Words of *amazement.* The worshipper of Jehovah thinking to escape by flight! Convinced sinners often marvel at the inconsistencies of professed believers. 2. Words of *humanity.* They expostulate instead of punishing him. 3. Words of *rebuke.* None injure us so much as those who bring us under the wrath of God. Let us not add the blood of others to the guilt of our own sin.

The question for the backslider. "Why hast thou done this?" Did you not like the work God gave you to do? Did not religion answer your expectations? After trial, have you found that the world is better than Christ? Let all take the warning against disobedience, and learn that happiness consists only in walking with God and obeying his commands. "If his anger be kindled, yea, but a little, blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

HOMILETICS.

The Required Sacrifice.—*Verses* 11, 12.

The sea still raged and testified to the anger of God. The light of nature and the dictates of conscience taught the sailors, the law and the history of his nation taught Jonah, that God was just and must be satisfied. Hence the anxiety of the crew and the submission of the prophet. Learn:—

I. That sin confessed does not always bring immediate relief in distress. Jonah had honestly confessed his guilt and felt deep remorse, but something more was requisite. God's purpose is not accomplished by mere acknowledgment of wrong. Great storms never come from small sins. The servant of Jehovah must be corrected and the guilty feel God's displeasure. The longer we remain in sin and the

greater our reluctance to duty, the more tempestuous will be the sea. **II. That men truly humbled in distress are anxious to follow the revealed will of God.** The mariners had solemnly appealed to God and knew Jonah to be his servant. They fear God, do not take the matter into their own hands, but ask counsel through Jonah. Tenderness, humanity, and subjection are the kindly fruits of affliction. The anxious enquirer and the restored servant desire to know the revealed will of God, and do nothing without his guidance. "Lead me in thy truth and teach me." **III. That those sensible of their own desert are not willing to involve others in distress.** Jonah felt that he was the cause of suffering and peril to his fellow-creatures—that God's justice should take him and spare them. "Cast *me* forth into the sea; and the sea shall be calm to *you*." A true penitent submits to be chastised for his iniquity; but when others suffer with him, he is concerned. In the providence of God we often involve others in danger by our sin, and are called upon to endure risk and self-sacrifice to save them. "It is I that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done?"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 11. *What shall we do?* The moral demeanour of these men indicates, 1. Kindly feeling towards Jonah. 2. Solemn awe of Jehovah. 3. Natural horror against taking away human life. It was treatment unexpected and undeserved, a pattern to many in more favourable circumstances. "With the well-advised there is wisdom."

Ver. 12. *Jonah's reply.* "Could anything be more noble, upright, honourable? There is, *first*, a renewed acknowledgment—frank, free, and full—of his own obnoxiousness to the Divine anger, and of himself as the source and occasion of the present danger. 'For I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.' There is, *secondly*, an unreserved surrender or appointment of himself to death, as the means of solving the appalling difficulty, and stilling the raging of the deep. 'Take me up and cast me forth into the sea.' And there is, *thirdly*,—what may be valued as coming from a prophet of that God 'which made the sea and the dry land'—a prediction that the expedient will be efficacious; 'so shall the sea be calm unto you'" [*Hugh Martin*].

Jonah reads out his own doom, and that both as a penitent offender and a prophet of the Lord. As the *former*, conscious that he was the cause of the sufferings and peril of his fellow-creatures, he felt it just that the vengeance of God should light on *him*, if haply his mercy might spare *them*. As the *latter*, he opens out the Divine will respecting himself, and unconsciously instructs us respecting that great propitiation for the sins of the world of which he was to be a remarkable type (Is. liii. 5: Matt. xii. 40: John xi. 50) [*Sibthorp*]. We see more and more the working of grace in the prophet's soul; (1) in his acknowledgment of merited judgment; (2) his patient submission, and (3) tender regard for others. But in the two latter respects how was he surpassed by Jesus! Observe another resemblance between Jonah and Christ: both gave up themselves to still the storm of God's wrath against sin; yet *herein* is a great difference between them. This storm was of the prophet's own raising; not so that for which Christ gave himself to death. *We caused* that tempest; *he*, being innocent, *allayed* it by his own blood [*Ibid.*].

HOMILETICS.

Labour in Vain.—*Verses* 12, 13.

We shall translate Jonah's history into spiritual illustrations of man's experience and action with regard to Christ and his gospel. We have here a picture of what most men do before they resort to God's remedy; that remedy is fairly imaged in the deliverance of the ship's company by the sacrifice of one on their behalf.

I. Our first observation is, that **sinners when they are tossed upon the sea of conviction, make desperate efforts to save themselves.** The men rowed hard, strained every sinew, and laboured by violence. No language can express the earnest action with which awakened sinners unlawfully struggle to obtain eternal life. They try *moral reformation.* Others add to their reformation *a superstitious regard to the outward of religion.* Many persons row hard to get the ship to land by *a national belief in orthodox doctrine.* Many are resting upon their own *incessant prayers.* Others are toiling by a sort of *mental torture.* II. Like these mariners, **the fleshy efforts of awakened sinners must inevitably fail.** "They could not." With all man's rowing after mercy and salvation, he can never find it by his own efforts. First of all, *it is contrary to God's law for a sinner to get comfort by anything he can do for and by himself.* Because *in what he is doing he is insulting God.* He is also *in the way of the curse.* **III. The soul's sorrow will continue to increase so long as it relies upon its own efforts.** It may be overruled for good, but the effect of all that the creature does before it believes is mischievous. The *good* effect lies in this: *the more a man strives to save himself, the more convinced will he become of his own impotence.* Another good result follows, that a man striving to save himself by law, *finds out the spirituality of that law,* a spirituality which he never saw before. But much of this toil is *mischievous. It makes unbelief take a firmer grip.* Giant Despair's prisoners do not all escape; he has a yard full of bones, the relics of willing prisoners who would not be comforted. Some sinners make excuses for themselves out of their despair, and let their doubts and fears grow till they cast a thick shadow over them. IV. We will try to explain God's plan. **The way of safety for sinners is to be found in the sacrifice of another on their behalf.** Leave out the fact that Jonah was sinful, and he becomes an eminent type of Christ. Substitution saves the mariners: substitution saves sinners. Jesus dies, and there is a calm. Conscience accuses no longer. Judgment decides for and not against the sinner. Memory looks back with sorrow for sin, but with no dread of penalty to come. Let us enjoy the peace "that passeth all understanding." Then go to work for God, not to win life and heaven, for they are ours already; but loved by him, let us love and serve him with perfect heart [*Spurgeon*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 12. *Because of me.* "True conviction of sin will produce honest confession of sin *sometimes* to our fellow-creatures; *always* before God. Let it add to those bitter herbs of repentance with which we feast on our Passover (1 Cor. v. 7, 8), to reflect how often and largely our iniquity has aided to make the mass of human guilt more offensive and of human misery more grievous."

Ver. 13. Here we find, *I. Compassion displayed when undeserved.* 1. In pity for the sufferer. 2. In regard to his God. 3. In fear of bloodguiltiness. *II. Conscience overcoming self-interest.* The men were assured of calm by getting rid of Jonah; but perhaps the force of conscience showed that the guilt of murder would rest upon them if they threw him overboard. Listen to conscience when duty and self-interest seem to conflict. *III. The servant spared from fear of the master.* "Do my prophets no harm." If we fear God, men feel that they offend him by injuring us. "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye."

We have here an admirable example of dealing with an offending brother. They dreaded to punish after his guilt was proved; and they could not tell how far he was restored again into God's favour as a penitent. Let us walk by the same rule towards fallen brethren [*Jones*].

Learn also—1. *The benefits of affliction. Jonah* is no longer perverse and disobedient, and the *mariners* are brought to call upon the true God. 2. *The folly of fighting against God.* Providence

was adverse. They rowed against the stream. No success in opposition to God. Without his help all schemes are like ploughing the deep and contending with the storm. "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord."

HOMILETICS.

PAGAN PRAYERS.—*Verses* 13, 14.

The men ceased to row, their labour was in vain. They only increased their own danger and prolonged the suffering of one they endeavoured to save—

> "At once they plough the brine; and all the deep
> Yawns wide" [*Virg. Æneid*].

They recognized the hand of God in the storm, and believed the power of God supreme. They lay down their oars and appeal to God.

I. Prayer connected with labour. "It is well to labour, and it is well to pray," said Luther. Prayer strengthens and directs in labour. It sweetens toil and brings success. Jupiter gave no help to the waggoner till he put his own shoulders to the wheel. The fable is abused when men despise prayer and dependance upon God. **II. Prayer in trouble.** They had done all they could, but were not relieved. For the first time probably these heathens prayed to the God of Israel. Sorrow and danger give speciality and intensity to supplication (Gen xxxii. 9: Is. xxxvii. 15—20). Pressing trouble forces itself from the heart to the lips. We cry to God in distress, when we have failed without him. Prayer is our first and last refuge in trouble. It should ever be the first means we use for deliverance. "Call upon me in the day of trouble."

> "The man is praying who doth press with might
> Out of his darkness into God's own light" [*Trench*].

III. Prayer in the emergencies of life. There are not only troubles, but special difficulties and dangers in life. These men were perplexed. The storm demands the prophet, but the justice of God might require his blood at their hands. Whatever be our difficulties, prayer offers help and leads us to the great Disposer of all things (Prov. iii. 6: 1 Pet. v. 7). "He that prays despairs not; but sad is the condition of him that cannot pray," says Jeremy Taylor.

"As when the last sentence of the law is carried out on land, the offices of religion are performed in the presence and on behalf of the culprit, so here there is prayer, most earnest and most appropriate, preceding the last sad act that shall part them and their passenger for ever" [*Raleigh*].

I. The object of their prayer. "O Jehovah." The storm and the confession of Jonah have weaned them from their idols. They take in the idea of God, discern his power, and believe him—1. *To be "the hearer of prayer."* 2. *To be the Supreme Ruler of all events.* "They had but just known God," says Pusey, "and they resolve the whole mystery of man's agency and God's providence into three simple words, '*As* (thou) *willedst* (thou) *didst.*'" All things, however adverse, were traced to God's sovereign disposal. The storm and the lot, the direction of the prophet and the impossibility to land him. "Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." **II. The nature of their prayer.** 1. *It was intensely earnest.* "They *cried*." The language is that of earnest supplication, the particle expressive of entreaty being repeated. There was no time for formal prayer. We deal not in general petitions in trouble like this; such tribulation becomes the tutor of prayer, and leads to maturity of knowledge and experience 2. *It was wonderfully submissive.* Till we can say "Thy will be done," we have need of more prayer and submission. If God please himself let us be satisfied. We cannot alter circumstances. But when the will of God is clearly made known

let us ever follow it. **III. The purpose of their prayer.** They think of themselves and their passenger. 1. They pray *for the preservation of their own life.* "Let us not perish for the life of this man." They were not prompted by *fear*, nor by *selfishness*, for then would they have cast Jonah into the sea. Truth has beamed upon them and God is recognized. They felt his anger and became executioners of his justice. In a short time they learned much of the true God, and were gradually led to worship him. 2. They pray *that the guilt of murder may not rest upon them.* "Lay not upon us innocent blood." The light of nature, the teaching of tradition, and the laws of their country, taught that they forfeited life when they took life. Conscience speaks, the providence of God seems to confirm the confession of his servant, yet they are reluctant to cast him out. If it must be done, they pray to be forgiven. "The people of God were shedding innocent blood like water, in the cities of Palestine (2 Kings ix. 7 : 2 Chron. xxiv. 21 : Matt. xxiii. 35) : these heathen sailors fear to pour that of one guilty man into the recesses of the deep. The offences of professors of religion are often made to stand out in awful prominency by the restraints which nature and conscience put on those of others (Rom. ii. 27 : 1 Cor. v. 1 : Matt. xxvii. 24, 25)." "At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man" (Gen. ix. 5, 6).

The Sacrifice and the Calm.—*Verse* 15.

A funeral at sea is a solemn event. It is a trying hour when the remains of a friend or comrade have to be cast into the deep. But no funeral service like that of Jonah. Not in haste and desperation, but in solemn silence and respect they lift him up and cast him into the sea. The yawning deep engulfs the unresisting prophet and the angry ocean smooths her face.

I. The sacrifice offered. After they had done all they could, something else was required. 1. *A sacrifice caused by sin.* Jonah's disobedience caused Jonah's death. When men run into sin, they run into ruin here and hereafter. God's favour and heaven are cast away by the wicked. Whatever sin is the Jonah, it must be cast away or it will drown us in perdition. 2. *A sacrifice required by the will of God.* The sea did not cease from raging. Jonah had told them what was required, and the providence of God confirmed the prediction. God's law must be honoured and sin punished. 3. *A sacrifice offered for the safety of others.* Jonah was submissive in the face of death, and far more concerned for the lives of others than for his own. He thus becomes a type of Jesus, who was offered a sacrifice for our sins, "a ransom for many." If he had not suffered for us, the waterfloods of guilt and the waves of grief would have compassed us and carried us away. **II. The calm which followed.** "The sea stayed from her raging." 1. *A proof of God's power over the elements of nature.* The wind ceases, the billows rest, and danger is past. "The lower is subject to the higher, nature to moral providence, and providence to God." "Thou rulest the raging of the sea : when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them" (Ps. lxxxix. 9 ; xciii. 3 ; cvii. 29). 2. *A confirmation of right conduct.* The men would hesitate and doubt, but God gives them immediate comfort. They have obeyed his will, and he will make them know and feel it, by outward calm and inward peace. When we submit to God's will he will not any longer contend with us. 3. *A type of peace through Christ.* When he was cast forth and sank into the sea that threatened the world with ruin there was a universal calm. God's justice was satisfied and his anger ceased. "Fury is not in me." We may have peace with God if we cast out of our hearts the sin which provokes his wrath (Jer. iv. 1 : Is. lvii. 20, 21). "God hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ."

The Converted Heathen.—*Verses* 14 *and* 16.

Perhaps these men were more candid and less depraved than heathen generally. They seem at any rate to be prepared by education and discipline to receive the

truth. But under the guidance of the Spirit they were converted through the teaching of Jonah.

I. What led to their conversion? God prepared the way by the presence of his servant on board. But Jonah would not have spoken to them, nor would they have listened to him, but for the storm, the danger, and the lot. Perhaps, as in many cases, some antecedent preparation may be traced. In Christian countries many can trace the leadings of Divine providence in bringing them to Christ. In heathen nations God has prepared tribes and individuals to believe the gospel when it has reached them. There are preparations in language, changes of government, corruption and decay of heathenism. "A great door and effectual is opened." **II. What was the evidence of their conversion?** When a Divine principle is implanted in the heart, then life is reformed and actions changed. 1. *They forsake idolatry.* Their former gods are abandoned, and now they seek to know the true God. Every soul born of God turns from lying vanities, and is drawn out to God in supplication and praise. 2. *They pray to Jehovah.* Prayer is the first act of a converted sinner. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Afterwards it is "the native air" in which he lives, moves, and has his being. If gratitude for God's goodness fills the heart, it will be expressed in acts of devotion. Special revelations of God in acts of grace or providence will beget true fear in us. "The men feared the Lord exceedingly." **III. What were the fruits of their conversion?** When storms are over and men are delivered it is common for them to return to indifference or ridicule. The only sure and permanent sign of conversion is holy life. 1. *These men feared Jehovah.* The storm was over, and they were delivered from death; but they return not after affliction to their former ways. Wonderful events had happened. Wind and storm had fulfilled the word of Jehovah, and they felt a great awe. "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God for thy good always" (Deut. vi. 13, 24). 2. *They offered sacrifice.* Not an offering in general, but a slaughtering of some lamb or fowl on board, as a victim to express their faith. They might not comprehend the full meaning of the Jewish rite. It was forgotten and obscured by heathen superstitions. "But a conscience could not be quickened to a sense of guilt before God, nor a hope of salvation from the just punishment of sin be cherished by a penitent heart, without its finding a natural expression in this ancient and once universal form of religious worship." Ignorant of Jewish customs, they fell back upon that of their ancestors, and God accepted their offering. 3. *They vowed vows.* They combine faith and works. They are not only moved in present gratitude, but think of the future. Many who escape danger, vow and forget their vows. Months pass, and they evince that fear was only a superficial thawing and no real opening of the heart. God requires present promise and future performance, a dedication of the whole life to him. If we do not fulfil our voluntary vows it is clear that our gratitude is not real and that our service is not a cleaving to God with all our hearts. "Vow and pay unto the Lord your God: let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared."

> "But when your ships rest, wafted o'er the main,
> And you, on altars raised along the shore,
> Pay your vow'd offerings" [*Æneid*].

The Great Miracle.—*Verse* 17.

By the mariners Jonah was thought to be drowned; but the providence of God had provided a living tomb for his servant. He is hurried through the depths of the sea, in judgment and mercy. He owned the hand and submitted to the will of God: he prayed for help, and was cast out of his sepulchre, a monument of God's mercy and a type of the Saviour of men. In this verse we have—

I. Providential anticipation. "The Lord had prepared a great fish." This preparation was (1) miraculous, and (2) merciful in its nature and design. It also

illustrates a principle which we find in all God's dealings with men, viz. Anticipations of providence. 1. In *the scheme of redemption* there was no after-thought. God provided a remedy before the fall. 2. In *the conversion of sinners* goodness and grace are prepared beforehand. 3. In *the exigencies of Christian life* God meets us ready to help. In prayer, trouble, and death he prepares, goes before us, and stands ready to bless. "The God of my mercy shall *prevent* (go before) me." **II. Typical events.** God had more places to send Jonah than to Nineveh. The course of things starts out in strange deviation from that uniformity which philosophers insist upon. We rest simply upon the Divine power which miraculously preserved the vital economy under the suspension of one of its greatest functions. If men like to deny or ridicule attested facts let them "sport themselves with their own deceivings," says one. In "the three days and three nights'" imprisonment of Jonah Christ sees a type of himself (Matt. xii. 40). 1. The analogies are his confinement to the deep and the grave that others might be saved. 2. The same duration of time in this dark retirement; and 3. The coming to light and life again for the reformation of mankind. Learn from the fact—1. The presence of God in history. 2. The purpose of God in controlling its events. 3. The power of God in making all things subservient to this purpose. "With the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

When the servants of God run away from an easy service, their Master frequently appoints them a harder task. If Jonah will not preach up and down the streets of Nineveh, he shall preach from the bottom of the sea [*Jones*].

1. When God pursues his rebellious children in a severe way, yet he doth not altogether cast off his mercy to them, but moderates their affliction. 2. God may have a mercy and proof of love waiting upon his people in a time and place where they would be least expected. For Jonah meets a mercy in the raging sea, into which he was cast in anger, as to be destroyed. 3. Although God's mercy will not destroy his guilty people in their afflictions, yet his wisdom sees fit not to deliver them at first, but to exercise their faith and heart [*Hutcheson*].

Ver. 17. "From how many unthought-of, unimaginable situations the Sovereign of the world has drawn devotional aspirations! but never, except once, from a situation like *this*" [*John Foster*]!

The sea and her inhabitants are God's and lie at his will (Luke v. 6: John xxi. 6). The mightiest and meanest creatures subserve his purposes, and are auxiliaries or adversaries to man as he chooses (Josh. xxiv. 12: 2 Kings xvii. 25) [*Sibthorp*].

The Type. Three days and three nights (Matt. xii. 40. Cf. Rom. iv. 25; vi. 4). In comparing the two—these two great interpositions of Godhead with Jonah and Jesus respectively—the type will illustrate the antitype. But there are points in which our clear knowledge of the antitype may be carried back to illustrate the type. This is the case in the very first resemblance. I. In both cases there is a death and a resurrection. Jonah speaks of his burial in terms in which the Messiah speaks of his "hell" and "corruption." In both cases it is the language of burial and resurrection. II. But secondly: in both cases, the death and burial are judicial processes. Each of the processes is an atonement and expiation, pacifying the Divine Judge, satisfying Divine justice, abolishing guilt, restoring peace. III. The burial and resurrection of Jonah constituted the gate by which the word of Jehovah passed forth from the Jewish to the Gentile world. In like manner the death and resurrection of Christ was the breaking down of the middle wall of partition. IV. The analogy holds further in this respect, that the experiences of Jonah and Christ constitute, each in its own sphere, an enforcement of the message which each brings to the Gentiles. V. Jonah's experience was his preparation for new loyalty and

obedience; and in the kingdom of Christ, Christ's risen life is the source of newness of life and service. Jonah was a new man on dry land, with a new life and a new career opening before him. O believer in a risen Christ, is not this the type and fashion of your life of faith? With what freshness—as of the morning light of an eternal Sabbath; and with what force—as of the eternal power of Messiah's resurrection; may that blessed appeal be made to us, "If ye then be risen" (Col. iii. 1) [*H. Martin*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1. The *name* Jonah signifies "a dove." But there is not much of "mourning love," of which the dove has always been taken as the symbol in the record. The name might express his father's feeling; as applied to himself it seems a misnomer. The hawk, the raven, or the vulture would seem to be more truly symbolical. But let us not forget that he tells his own tale, after the things recorded are past: that he tells it very expressly to the glory of God's mercy, with which designedly he sets his own hardness and thoughtless cruelty in contrast [*Raleigh*]. There is but *one* reason for the *mission* stated here; but several others in reserve—some gently hinted, some unrevealed until after ages [*Raleigh*].

Ver. 2. "Jonah and his 'arise' giveth a warning to us all, for we have all a Nineveh to go into. Magistrates, arise and go to the gate to execute God's judgments. Ministers, arise and go to the gospel to do the works of evangelists. People, arise and go to your trades," &c. [*King*].

Ver. 3. To leave the presence of God is to "*go down;*" and the history of many a day might, in the evening, be written too faithfully in the sad record, "I have been going down." Down from communion, from a conscious faith, from quietness, and firm, steady obedience. Down into strife without victory, into toil without fruit; into mere money-making, mere pleasure-seeking, mere time-wasting. The success and glory of true life can only be found in keeping the *upward* road—in hearing and following the voice which perpetually says, "Come up hither" [*Raleigh*]!

Vers. 4, 5. *Storm.* Some years ago an infidel embarked at Buffalo with a printing-press, to set up an infidel publication in Cleveland. He annoyed the passengers by his zeal to discuss the subject of religion. When a storm arose and threatened them with destruction, he was not only willing to throw overboard his press, but was conspicuous for his prayers and cries for mercy. When the storm was over, and he found himself a laughing-stock among the wicked and an object of pity to the pious, he went back to his infidelity and blamed his early education in superstition, as he called it, for his fright and prayers [*Mitchell*].

Ver. 6. *Sleeper.* The saint's sleeping-time is Satan's tempting-time. No temptation so weak but is strong enough to foil a Christian that is napping in security. Samson asleep, and Delilah cut his locks. Noah asleep, and his graceless son has a fit time to discover his father's nakedness. Thus the Christian asleep in security may soon be surprised, so as to lose much of his spiritual strength [*An old Divine*].

Ver. 7. *Lots.* Religion, even in its rudest forms, has always been faithful to its general principle thus far, that when the anger of the Divinity has been apprehended, it has been understood to be *against sins* and *crimes;* and also that the Divinity was believed to know *who* was the criminal. The mariners, therefore, referred it to the avenging Power to *point out* the criminal by a common ancient practice. A reference this *not* to *chance*, but to a superior intelligence. Could our prophet have any doubt *where* the lot would fall? No: his *conscience* must have been a prophet to him [*John Foster*].

Ver. 8. How natural the questions!

"Say, strangers, for what cause
Explore your ways unknown? or whither tends

Your voyage here? Whence come you? From what race
Derived? And bring you hither peace or war?"
[*Trapp's Virgil.*]

Vers. 10, 11. Let God be clearly known as he is revealed, and with few exceptions men cannot *but* believe in him. A few philosophers will reason and refine, and abide in intellectual disbelief. A few very wicked men will "believe a lie," that they may work unrighteousness: but the great mass of men, like these sailors from Tarshish, will quickly yield, at least by intellectual assent, to the influence of the truth [*Raleigh*].

Vers. 12, 13. *Take me up*, nevertheless the men rowed hard. Man has no right to take away his own life. We should also be careful of the life of others. The sailors thought it could not be right nor pleasing to God to cast Jonah into the deep. It would be a loss of goodness, thought, and self-denying regard for them. They were actuated by human motives, and illustrated the principle of moral life that our spirit and conduct have a tendency to reproduce themselves in others. Men have responsive feelings, answer heart to heart, and thus make life beautiful.

"All life is sacred in its kind to heaven,
And all things holy, beautiful, and good."
[*Bailey.*]

Ver. 12. *Be calm unto you.*

"Immortal hope,
Takes comfort from the foaming billows rage,
And makes a welcome harbour of the tomb."
[*Young.*]

Vers. 15, 17. The men must have talked about the voyage and its issues, especially about what took place after Jonah was in the sea. *He* knew nothing about that, and could only record it here because he had been told it by others. By whom? No doubt that story was told far and near, and he might have heard it from any one. But most probably he heard it from their own lips—from captain and ship's company, gathered together, perhaps, on the deck of that very vessel. It is not improbable that the prophet took a journey to Joppa on purpose; that he went to the old place; that he stood once more on the deck of the ship—captain and crew around him — to tell and hear their mutual stories of preservation. You can fancy the meeting. You can see the man. You can imagine how the whole matter would be bruited abroad even as far as Nineveh; and how the story told there, and well authenticated, would prepare that great and guilty city for receiving the message of the prophet when he actually came [*Raleigh*].

Remember, therefore, this advice: Never let the advantages with which you begin life's voyage lull you into confidence and negligence, nor difficulties lead you to despair; persevere in that path which reason and justice point out, and then despair not of reaching your desired port [*Hamlain*].

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES]. **Prayed**] Really praised. **His**] not only to Jehovah as the sailors did. "He shows his *faith* by adoring Him as *his* God" [*Burk*]. The structure of this hymn, composed like many Psalms, and filled with allusions to them, falls into three strophes (vers. 4, 6, and 8); each of which rises from distress to deliverance and hope [cf. *Lange*]. **2. Cried**] More definite than Ps. xvi. 1, and cxx. 1. **Belly**] Womb of Sheol, *i. e.* the peril of death; snares of death (Ps. xviii. 5); deliverance out of Sheol (Ps. xxx. 3). **3. Deep**] abyss (Ps. xlii. 7). **Midst**] Heart of the seas, in the fathomless depth, away from the shores. **Floods**] The stream or current of the sea which sweeps along, as Ps. xxiv. 2. **Waves**] from *Strābăr*, to break; thy breakers and thy billows roll. "*Thy* billows, because he felt in his conscience that the sea with its waves and billows was the servant of God and of his wrath to punish sin" [*Luther*]. **4. Said**] in my heart, *i. e.* I thought that I

was banished from thy protection and care (Ps. xxxi. 23). **Look**] Lit. look intently, an assurance that he will yet appear in the temple to praise God (Ps. v. 8). **5**] This strophe opens like the first, sets forth the peril of death, and describes the thought of miraculous deliverance. **Surrounded**] Pressed even to the soul (Ps. lxix. 2; xviii. 5). **Weeds**] Sea-weeds, vast quantities of which were found in the Mediterranean, were bound about his head "like a grave band. A peril even to the strong swimmer, entangling him the more he struggles to extricate himself. But to one below, powerless to struggle, it was as his winding-sheet" [*Pusey*]. **6. Bottoms**] Cuttings off, ends or extremities, hence foundations (cf. Ps. xviii. 7—15). It seemed as if the earth itself formed the vault, the living coffin into which he was shut up (Deut. iii. 5: Job xxxviii. 10). "The bolts of the sea are the walls of the sea-basin, which set bounds to the sea that it cannot pass over" [*Keil*]. **Corruption**] Lit. the pit (Is. xxxviii. 17: Job xvii. 4). **7. Fainted**] Heb. to cover one's self or to veil, then to sink, to pine away: *Rem.* the triumph of faith over sense. **Temple**] from which prayers are heard (Ps. xlii. 6; lxxiii. 26). **8.**] When prayer reaches to God he helps and saves. Salvation is only from Him. Idolaters forfeit their mercy. **Observe**] Lit. regard, hold to, an intensive form: "pay deference to vain, sue *vanity of vanities*, vain things which prove ruin at last" [*Pusey*]. **Mercy**] Lit. their *goodness, i. e.* God, their Benefactor, the Author of all mercies (Ps. cxliv. 2). **9. I will**] The vow of a pious man as opposed to the life of apostates. As the mariners ended their sacrifice with vows, so Jonah ends his prayer with thanksgiving. **Sal.**] Lit. a mighty salvation (an intensive form) which God gives to his people after affliction, "is wholly His; all belongs to Him, so that none can share in bestowing it" [*Pusey*]. **10. Spake**] His uttered voice produces everything. In heaven, earth, and sea, all things submit to him. **Land**] Probably the coast of Palestine. This circumstance typical of a more wonderful event, when death will be swallowed up of victory (Is. xxvi. 19: 1 Cor. xv. 54).

HOMILETICS.

In the Deep.—*Chap. II.*

As soon as the prophet was entombed, he *knew* that he was in a living grave. Then began that new and bitter experience recorded in the prayer of this chapter. We have no *external* history of those days. But we have a very intense and clear history of his *inward* life. Speaking generally, there was evidently *a great and sudden quickening of consciousness.* The man who speaks in this holy psalm hardly seems the same person whom we have seen in flight—dark, moody, silent, despairing. Beneath the waves the whole man reveals himself to God. Men rescued from drowning have told of quickened consciousness in danger—how they have lived again through years of past moments, estimated possible means of escape, and pierced with anticipative thought into the two possible futures—that of time, and that of eternity. Then rapidly this new consciousness *became distressful.* His soul fills itself fuller than the sea with "affliction." The reserved sorrow of sinning comes all at once. If sinners knew the fruitage of their ungodliness, what the universe would be when Divine presence is darkened out of them, and what the bitterness of that moment when the soul awakes in the thought, "God is now away, perhaps for ever," they would stay the beginnings of departure as men keep back from a slippery precipice. Then he *began to "look"*—upwards to earth, eastwards to the temple, where he knew that the lost presence was richly manifested. This is one of the most characteristic acts of faith—*to look*, although death may come in the looking. This is a tough battle. It is hard to fight above-ground; but to fight as deep as ever plummet sounded, where stretches the shadow of death, is grand. *The look soon became a cry.* It may have been literally a vocal cry. The voice was much used by Jews in gladness, sorrow, and worship—especially by great and impassioned souls. This may have been Jonah's habit on land, the means of preserving his life in the deep, and may have so acted upon the sensations of his submarine custodian as to induce at length the disgorgement. But *it was the cry of the soul*, which rose from farthest depths in one instant, without injuring natural law, above all heights, to the primal springs of power and earthly providence. *He began to be grateful.* Some measure of gratitude mingled with his distress from the first, but as he felt himself still alive as time rolled on, then would come a feeling of thankfulness. There was daybreak in the land of the shadow of death. Then, apparently, his soul passed into a more active state of *renewed personal consciousness to God.* Religious thankfulness nearly

always grows into that. The voice of thanksgiving begins with the act of sacrifice. Vows when truly made are paid. The prophet resolved "I will"; acted when deliverance came. The *final* state of his mind—that into which all other feelings subside and resolve themselves—*is a state of entire dependence*, involving a quiet and trustful surrender of himself to God. I have done all I can, need not cry any more. If God will accept me for active service I shall be delivered. If not, I shall trust in him: "Salvation is of the Lord" [*Raleigh*].

PRAYER AND DISTRESS.—*Verses* 1—4.

Jonah now describes his mournful and dismal condition. Let us notice his sorrows, prayers, and hopes.

I. The great distress. "I cried by reason of my distress." 1. *Distress in the deep.* Pharaoh's army sank into the deep; and the sea is often as the grave. (*a*) *Into the heart of the* seas, far away from the shores, and down into the fathomless bottom. (*b*) *Encircled* by *the floods.* "The floods have compassed me" (cf. Ps. xlvi. 3; lxix. 1, 2; lxxxviii. 6). (*c*) *Swept by the billows.* The broken surges and mountain-billows rolled over his head. Sin casts into darkness and dismal gulfs. The punishment of God is often intense, but love is seen in it all. "*Thy* waves." 2. *Distress in Sheol.* "From the belly of hell." His confinement was like the lower world, the region of ghosts. But no abyss of grief is beyond Divine help. God can keep alive and deliver from the pit. "O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave, thou hast kept me alive that I should not go down to the pit." 3. *Distress away from God's presence.* "I am driven out of thy sight." This was the worst of all, yet only a just retribution for one who had fled from the presence of God. Jonah's sin, and the Divine judgment upon it, pierced his soul, darkened his prospect, and led him to despair. Hope of deliverance for body or soul seemed no longer cherished. But man's extremity is God's opportunity. Bradford said the prison can be made the palace of the Great King Seek to be near God, and feel distressed at distance which is (*a*) a penal consequence of sin; (*b*) a sad complaint with God's people. "Why standest thou afar off, O Lord?" **II. The earnest prayer.** Sorrows within, around, and above him, led him to cry out to God. The Church is indebted for its best men, and the world for its best sayings, to affliction. Many of God's children have first prayed by reason of distress. Backsliders have been reclaimed, and prayers quickened into cries, by poignant grief. 1. *Its intensity.* "I cried." Prosperity tends to negligence, formality, and deadness in prayer; distress makes it earnest and ardent (Jas. v. 13). "Many, silent with their lips, have cried aloud with their heart," says Augustine. "Many, noisy with their lips, could, with heart turned away, obtain nothing." 2. *Its directness.* "Unto Jehovah, and Jehovah as *his* God" (ver. 1). Away from himself, and up to the throne of the Eternal, were his confidence and desire fixed. He was yet the servant of God, linked to him by past discipline and future hope. The covenant of God stands firm, and brighter than stars does it shine in the depths of sorrow. "This God is our God." 3. *Its place.* "The fish's belly." What an oratory! No place is amiss for prayer. The wilderness and the den, the prison, and "the belly of hell." The voice of a child is heard wherever he cries in distress. "Call upon me in the day of trouble," &c. 3. *Its language.* Most of its expressions are found in the Psalms. It is well to be conversant with Scripture, which gives consolation and aids devotion in all circumstances. Our prayers would be more refreshing to others, and more acceptable to God, if offered in words of inspiration. 4. *Its speed.* "Thou heardest my voice." God, who cast him down, lifted him up; inspired his heart, and answered his petition. God had called upon Jonah, and often calls to us, without response. But when we turn in penitence and prayer to him he listens. There is a *voice* in faith and prayer which God quickly hears, for "he delighteth in mercy."

"Prayer ardent opens heaven" [*Young*].

REVIVED FEELING.—*Verse* 4.

By degrees Jonah gained strength to hope and pray. His despondency was only momentary. A ray of light pierced the darkness, and blessed his heart. "I will look *again*," &c. Learn—

I. **That a servant of God may be overcome with fear.** Not only assaulted with temptation and despair, but *overcome* by them for a time. Men change in feeling, rejoice to-day, and doubt to-morrow. Light and darkness alternate in the spiritual as in the natural world. But resist temptation, seek to gather strength, and *look again*. "Cast not away, therefore, your confidence." II. **That the weakest act of faith may be mighty in overcoming fear.** Faith in God will sustain us in extremest sufferings, and find a way in greatest impediments. To remain in unbelief, rest under the waves, or trust in anything but the promise, is folly. Jonah looked not at probabilities, at things as they really were, but with fixed eye toward the holy temple. His faith pierced the darkness, and pictured the mercy-seat and the Divine presence. A true retrospect of God's house will tinge the present with hope, and dissipate the clouds that darken our horizon. "All things are possible to him that believeth."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 2. The *affliction*. 1. Its acknowledged source. Neither himself nor the mariners were considered. All comes from God. "*Thou* hast cast me into the deep." "*Thy* waves," &c. "It was not you, but God, that sent me here." 2. Its *benevolent design*. Design there was, and that design not malevolent. "God is love." He does not afflict willingly, but for our future good and his glory.

"Now let us thank the Eternal Power, convinced
That heaven but tries our virtue by affliction:
That oft the cloud which wraps the present hour,
Serves but to brighten all our future days."

Vers. 2, 3. The right use of the Psalter. Even holy men of God, who were partakers of the Holy Ghost, have not refused to appeal to, and to cite formally, the books of Scripture, which existed already in their time. A strong argument for the authority of the Holy Scriptures [*Lange*].

Depths. 1. Sorrow. 2. Despair. 3. Desertion.

"One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow" [*Shakespeare*].

"Thus woe succeeds woe, as wave a wave."
[*Herrick*.]

Look again. 1. *A determination* to remember God in future. 2. *An expression of encouragement* derived from displays of Divine providence and mercy. "God gave him no hope save that he preserved him alive. For he seemed to himself forsaken of God. Wonderful pattern of faith which gains strength even from God's seeming desertion" [*Pusey*].

Again, past experience in God's house. 1. *When improved*. (*a*) A source of comfort in distress. (*b*) A ground of hope for future blessings. 2. *When abused*. (*a*) Taken an evidence of present grace. (*b*) Made an excuse for further effort. If you have not force enough to contemplate God in heaven, try again by fresh exercises of faith and prayer; you may be refreshed with a more excellent view and better hope than Moses had on Nebo's summit. *The hasty conclusion*. "Then I said, I am cast out." I. Its cause. 1. Consciousness of guilt. 2. Calamity interpreted as visitations of God. II. Its folly. God reproves, and often severely, but never casts away his children. When we speak in haste we do not consider. Our minds are then disturbed, and we distrust God. (Cf. David, 1 Sam. xxvii. 1: Ps. xxi. 22.) "Hasty words," says one, "are but for a moment on the tongue, but they often lie for years on the conscience." The mischief of hasty conclusions is great. "Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off. I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon."

HOMILETICS.

THE HORRIBLE PIT.—*Verses* 5, 6.

The prophet again enlarges on his terrible and apparently hopeless condition, reviews the awful deep from whence he was delivered, and admires the power of God in his salvation.

I. The depth of the pit. The poet or the painter can add nothing to the description here given of the prisoner in the deep. He was cast down into a dark, fearful dungeon, amid horrible gloom and rushing torrents. Forgotten of mankind; confined in anguish and hell. Sin always casts men into extremity and death. **II. The dangers of the pit.** His peril was imminent. The terrors of the Almighty, the elements of nature, set themselves in array against him. 1. He was *encompassed by waters.* Excluded from the atmosphere and light on the surface, he felt almost suffocated beneath the waves. His very *soul* was submerged, and pressed by the floods so that life was almost extinct. "Encompassed me even to the soul." 2. He was *barred by the earth.* He was carried to the base of the rocks, the roots of the mountains, whose summits overtopped the waves. 3. He was *enclosed in the deep.* "The deep closed me in." He could sink no lower, and it was impossible to rise higher. He was confined on all sides. Earth and sea formed the vault within which he was for ever shut. 4. He was *wrapped round with sea-weeds.* The *alga* or *weed* was bound about his head, and made it like a state of death or living corruption. "As the monster within which he was caverned glided through the vast submarine forests, they seemed to enclose him in their green and slippery coverts, or portions of sea-weed, swallowed by the fish, wrapped itself around him." **III. The deliverance from the pit.** "Thou hast brought up my life." His rescue was like a resurrection of the body, and displayed the grace and power of Jehovah. God delivered him from sufferings described and recorded when he was on dry land. His soul also was recovered to true penitence, and the light of God's countenance. He could now say, "O Lord, my God." "A sweet renewed sense of pardoning love is often the pleasant shore on which we step out of the deep mire of our sorrowful troubles." **IV. The gratitude to the deliverer.** It is a good thing to give thanks to God for blessings received. It is common with God to deliver when nobody else can. Every mercy is the expression of a thought, the manifestation of a purpose. God's mercies are innumerable, and must be publicly acknowledged to quicken our own hearts and those of others (Is. xxxviii. 17). "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings' (Ps. xl. 2, 3).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 5. *Trials like water.* Deep, heavy, and overwhelming. It is sad to be perfectly sensible of your situation, yet not able to do anything for relief; to struggle, and become more fettered by the effort.

The deliverance. 1. This deliverance was, humanly speaking, most *unlikely.* 2. It was highly *benevolent.* "Brought up my *life.*" It was a treasure beyond all price that was restored to the prophet. 3. It was *Divinely wrought.* "Yet hast *thou.*" 4. It was *recognized and appreciated* by Jonah. "O Lord, my God." These words are full of meaning, and express the faith and joy of the Prophet [*Exell*].

Vers. 5, 6. *Bringing up and preservation.* Two great blessings traced to the hand of God, and prompting to gratitude on account of the evils described.

HOMILETICS.

REMEMBRANCE OF GOD.—*Verse* 7.

Jonah continues his reflections, and calls to mind his past experience in the deep. **I. Remembrance of God an antidote to fainting.** Men faint through heat, thirst, and exhaustion; but the worst fainting is in the mind (Heb. xii. 3). If the mind keeps strong we can bear up, but if that gives way we succumb to sorrow. Natural infirmities, trouble and temptation, may overcome the stoutest. The soul is filled with doubt, the heart grows weak, and faints away. Above all, guilt brings fear and drives away God, and casts dark shadows over our path. But if we are humble and turn to God in our despondency our souls will revive, and hope will dawn in regions of despair. Remembrance of (*a*) God's power, (*b*) God's promise, and (*c*) God's readiness to save, will renew our strength. "God will help and that right early." **II. Remembrance of God a stimulant to prayer.** "And my prayer came unto thee." Much depends upon what men look at in trouble. According to the object in view will be the direction of the thoughts. Some look at their situation, with its attendant evils, and faint. Others trust to wrong sources for help, and are disappointed. But remembrance of God will invigorate faith, and prompt to prayer. Constant thoughts of God would make life more devout and successful. Continual prayer to him would secure his presence, and turn the depths of death into a temple of praise. **III. Remembrance of God a proof of God's remembrance of us.** When we truly remember and pray to God in sorrow, it is an evidence that we are not forsaken by him. The spirit of prayer is given to be cultivated, and offered to him in hearty petitions. No greater mercy can we have in trial than to be kept prayerful and dependent upon God. Contrite prayer and enjoyment of God's favour are closely connected. Let us not forget God whatever else is forgotten.

THE MORAL CONTRASTS IN LIFE.—*Verses* 8, 9.

Jonah now expresses his feelings in sacrifice and praise, resolves to lead a new life, and pay his vows to God. This conduct stands in marked contrast to the ungodly who forget God, and forsake their own interests.

I. God is the highest good of men. What is the chief good of humanity has been the problem of ages, the aim of all religion and philosophy. Many have been the theories concerning it; but the declaration of God's word decides the question. 1. *God is the supreme good in himself.* David calls him, my goodness (Ps. cxliv. 2), my kindness or benignity; the God of my mercy (lix. 17). What is comprehended in the *summum bonum* of man—wisdom and justice, beauty and love—belong to him. He is the infinite excellence and the ultimate good of all men. 2. *God is the source of goodness to others.* He is good in himself, and his tender mercies are over all his works. He is the source and fountain of all our enjoyments. When he relieves the miserable it is *mercy;* when he bestows favour upon the unworthy it is *grace;* when he supplies the indigent it is *bounty.* God's mercy includes all the forms of his kindness shown to men; whether considered as creatures, as sinners, or as believers. "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." **II. The wicked forsake God, their highest good.** 1. This conduct is *wilful.* God does not forsake them. They voluntarily forsake him, and therefore should not blame him. Examples warn, hindrances check them, but they go on. In opposition to light and known results they obstinately choose death rather than life. 2. This conduct is *injurious.* "They forsake their *own mercy.*" They take nothing from God, but rob themselves of natural enjoyments, Divine favour which is better than life, and commit moral suicide. Sinners put God from them, who would be their life, and destroy themselves (Hos. xiii. 9). "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me love death." 3. This

conduct is *foolish*. "They observe lying vanities." They forsake the true for the false. (1) Idols are *vanities*. The gods of the heathen, or the idols of modern daye, are empty and vain. The worship of mammon and the desire of fame, the gods of intellect and superstitions, are worthless things. (2) Idols are *lying* vanities. They are both vanity and falsehood. They deceive by vain show, and in the end disappoint. (3) Yet men *observe* idols. They guard and love them, depend upon them, and pursue them with eagerness. Falsehood can neither feed the mind nor calm the conscience. Everything apart from God is vanity and lies. "O ye sons of men, how long will ye love vanity?" **III. The righteous serve God, their highest good.** The grace that had called forth prayer now ends in praise. Jonah vows, and pays his vows. 1. *They offer thanksgiving* to God. "The voice of praise." When we drink of the stream we should lift up our head to heaven. The least mercies are great when viewed as coming from God. Let this be felt, then we shall enjoy them, and gladly offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Our gratitude will be (*a*) sincere, (*b*) devout, and (*c*) continual. "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually; that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name." 2. *They dedicate their lives to God.* They renew their vows, and bind their treacherous heart the faster to God and duty. Jonah was ready to go and preach at Nineveh, or serve God anywhere, now. God's loving correction had made him great and bold. Let our oath of allegiance be renewed in every deliverance from trouble. Do not show coldness and ingratitude, which sense of duty and natural shame allow not to an earthly benefactor. Our future life should be a hymn of praise and a living sacrifice. Let the power derived from discipline, the gratitude prompted by mercy, be practical and abiding. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 8. Such were actual idols in which men openly professed that they trusted. Such are all things in which men trust out of God. One is not more vain than another. All have this common principle of vanity. It is, then, one general maxim, including all men's idols—idols of the flesh, idols of intellect, idols of ambition, idols of pride, idols of self and self-will. Men *observe* them as gods; watch them, hang upon them, never lose sight of them, guard them as though they could keep them. But what are they? *Lying vanities;* breath and wind which none can grasp or detain, vanishing like air into air. And what do they who so observe them? All alike *forsake their own mercy, i. e.* God, whose property is always to have mercy, and who would be mercy to them if they wanted [*Pusey*].

Ver. 9. *Praise.* It must be noticed here that the worship of God especially consists in praises, as it is said in Ps. l.; for there God shows that he regards as nothing all sacrifices except they answer this end—to set forth the praise of his name [*Calvin*].

Sacrifice. Now to offer a sacrifice at such a confession or thanksgiving added much to the solemnity thereof; and made it more honourable in itself and more acceptable to God [*Trapp*].

Vow. The Hebrew word seemeth to imply two things: *First*, that his vow till paid was incomplete; it was an imperfect thing; the better part of it was yet wanting. *Next*, till that were done he could not be at peace within himself; for vows are debts; and debts till they be paid are a burden to an honest mind, and do much disease it [*Ibid.*].

HOMILETICS.

Salvation of the Lord.—*Verse* 9.

By salvation here we do not understand Jonah's deliverance from death merely

Dr Gill says there is something so special in the original, the word having one more letter than it usually has when it only refers to temporal deliverance, that we must understand it here as relating to the great work of the soul, which endureth for ever. That salvation I shall try to show as best I can.

I. Expound the doctrine that salvation is of Jehovah. To begin at the beginning, the *plan of salvation is entirely of God.* And as in planning, so it *was of the Lord in execution.* Salvation, in the *application* of it, is from God. As to the *sustaining of the work in a man's heart*, salvation is of the Lord. **II. God has hedged this doctrine about to prevent mistake.** Some say, salvation in some cases is the result *of natural temperament.* Others, that the *minister* converts them. God takes care that salvation is not of man, for usually he blesses those who seem most unlikely to be useful. **III. What is, what should be, the influence of this doctrine upon men?** First, with sinners this doctrine is a *great battering-ram against their pride.* What influence upon the saint? Why, it is the keystone of all Divinity. I will defy you to be heterodox if you believe it; *proud*, if you feel it, you cannot be. You will not be *distrustful.* You may always be *joyful* if you keep it in mind. This may, by grace, *nerve you to work for God.* Go and preach the gospel everywhere, recollecting that God is more than a match for man's sin; and will ye be master over the earth? [*Spurgeon*].

The Great Deliverance.—*Verses* 9, 10.

These words were the result of recent experience, penned in grateful feeling, and adapted to all ages.

I. The inestimable blessing. "Salvation." 1. Its *magnitude.* In the intensive form it denotes a mighty salvation. The force of the Hebrew may include temporal and eternal salvation. Jonah's deliverance was unknown in history, unparalleled in God's dealings with men. God's power is drawn out by the emergencies of his people, often reserved for great occasions, and unlimited in its nature. "So great a salvation" is offered in Christ, that men should receive it and glorify him. 2. Its *fulness.* It was a complete salvation. Jonah was not left in the deep, nor sent to the surface to swim to land. The fish vomited out and cast him on *dry land.* He was left in no danger, but enjoyed a perfect rescue. "His work is honourable and glorious." **II. The Divine source from which it comes.** "Salvation is of the Lord." It is *wholly* his; and not part his, and part ours. It is *specially* and *peculiarly* his. It belongs to him, and no other. Hence understand the words, 1. *Affirmatively.* "To Jehovah be ascribed salvation." "Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever." 2. *Negatively.* There is salvation from no other source. "Beside me there is no Saviour." **III. The wonderful method of its accomplishment.** God "*spake* unto the fish." Some deny an active will and a personal presence in nature. They recognize nothing but matter and force. All creatures are controlled by law and instinct, say they. But Creation is subject to God's will. A fish was prepared for Jonah, and at the bidding of Jehovah it disgorged him. Hence, notice—1. The power of God over all creatures. The beasts of the field, and the fish of the sea; "all cattle, creeping things, and flying fowl," are governed by him. 2. The *ease* with which God governs all creatures. He has only to *speak*—the world is created, the storm is stilled, and the dead are raised. In heaven above, and in the remotest bounds of space, the highest archangel and the smallest atom, hearken and obey the voice of God. 3. The *times* in which God accomplishes his purpose in reference to all creatures. The time of the prophet's deliverance was come, and the sea-monster in whose belly he had traversed the deep, could not retain him. With unerring precision it bore him through the trackless ocean to the destined shore. Events are subservient to God, and at his pleasure carry believers to appointed duty, needful trial, and purchased rest. However dark your position or agitated your course, let faith realize and

prayer ask for, the overruling will of God, and all will be well. "My times are in thy hand."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 9. Salvation of God. 1. The feeling of assurance. 2. The expression of gratitude. 3. The ground of encouragement to others. Turn the prison of the world into the temple of God and it will not be able to detain thee [*Lange*].

Ver. 10. That time might not efface his impressions, he would hasten to record, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, for the instruction of his own countrymen and the Israel of God in all ages, the trials, mercies, and experience of the last few eventful days. The record has reached us, and besides other instruction, may remind us—*First*, That the troubles of believers have an appointed end, and a joyful one: the rod of their correction is not for ever (Ps. lxxvii. 7—11: Is. xlix. 14, 15). Let them, then, believe, submit, and wait. *Secondly*, That trust in God is that grace which it is their privilege and duty to exercise under all circumstances, even under manifest chastisements for admitted sins. The issue of such trust shall be good, truly and thoroughly good, and often, beyond all expectation, blessed and joyful. *Thirdly*, That Christians should not sorrow over departed Christians, as they who are without hope. This extraordinary circumstance in Jonah's history was typical of the far more wonderful and glorious event of the resurrection of Christ, and those who sleep with him. The grave shall disgorge her temporary prey, and then shall be brought to pass the saying, *Death is swallowed up of victory* [*Sibthorp*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1 — 4. *Affliction.* Sorrow sanctifies the soul that has passed through it, renders it supple and sweet, prompt with gentle sympathy. Larger self-knowledge has been acquired. One can date from such seasons deeper emotions, broader lines of thought, a stronger character, and enlarged experience. As Rodgers sings—

> "The good are better made by ill,
> As odours crushed are sweeter still."

Vers. 5, 6. Here his cry might be as dolorous as that of David in Ps. lxix. Some of the tried children of God have found cause to make it theirs; and so would all, if he gave the reins to their soul's enemies or dealt with them as their iniquities deserve. Let us look at the sufferings of Abraham, Joseph, Job, David, Jeremiah, Paul, and others of God's ancient saints, and adore his mercy toward us. But let us look from them at the Saviour, and at the deep and stormy waters he passed through [*Sibthorp*].

"Night brings out stars, as sorrow teaches truth."

Ver. 7. *Remembered.* As God doth plant and actuate grace in the soul, so he is pleased to come in with seasonable supplies and reinforcements to the weak and decayed graces of his people. Thus he feeds the believer's lamp with fresh oil; gives in more faith, more love, more hope, and more desires; and hereby he gives power to the faint, and strengthens the things which remain and are ready to die [*John Willison*].

This truth the poet sings—

"That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things" [*Tennyson*].

Ver. 8. *Vanity.* As well try to fill the yawning chasm with a few grains of sand as satisfy the gulf of the soul's desires with the pleasure of an empty world [*Macduff*].

Ver. 9. *Vowed.* The Archbishop of Cologne, being asked by the Emperor Sigismund how to attain true happiness, replied, "Perform when thou art well what thou promised when thou wast sick."

Ver. 10. *Providence.* We are not able to account for the method of Divine

providence in many instances. We talk of special and general providence; but it would be better if we could see that human life is one grand providence and purpose.

"Each man's life is all men's lessons."
[*Lord Lytton.*]

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **2. Arise**] J. might not imagine that God would send him again. But he appears to have some settled home, and an interval seems to have elapsed before the second commission, to give time for the report to spread. **Preach**] Lit. proclaim. **3. Went**] I am made wiser by correction. **Great city**] Lit. great to God. Some great *through* God, *i. e.* through his favour; others great before God. "It was most natural to refer the size of a city, of which the Hebrews could form no adequate conception, to the Divine estimation. I have accordingly rendered the words literally, as our preposition *to* is often used to note opinion, or estimate" [*Henderson*]. The Hebrews expressed superlative ideas by using the name of God, *e. g.* "mountains of God," "cedars of God," &c. **Three days**] in circumference, or the length of Jonah's journey through it. Expositors differ. **4. A day's journey**] commenced, when he found opportunity to preach. No time to loiter, nor gratify curiosity. **Cried**] as a herald. **Forty days**] The measure of delays in God's visitations. A number of frequent use in Scripture. **Overth.**] Lit. overturned (*evertere*), turning upside down, total destruction, as Sodom (Gen. xix. 25: Is. i. 7). **5. Believed**] Lit. *in* God, in his word; trusted in him. **Sackcloth**] The attire of deep mourning, irritating to the body. Fasting and sackcloth customary in humiliation (1 Kings xxi. 27: Joel i. 13). Penitence universal. **6. Word**] The matter; report of Jonah's preaching, and its effects in the city. Nineveh never so moved and shaken. **Laid aside**] The king approved the proclaimed fast, disdained not to follow the example of the people, but humbled himself with them in common peril. Some think that Sardanapalus was the king, whose motto was—"*Eat, drink, play: after death there is no pleasure.*" **7. Nobles**] The government of Nineveh was not an absolute monarchy. The nobles probably originated the decree, and the king confirmed it (cf. Dan. vi.). **Beast**] "It was no arbitrary, nor wanton, nor careless act of the king of Nineveh to make the dumb animals share in the common fast. It proceeded probably from an indistinct consciousness that God cared for *them* also and that *they* were not guilty" [*Elzaz*]. **8.**] Two remedies suggested. **Cry**] to God in prayer. **Turn**] Reform; for prayer, without amendment of life, is a mockery (Ps. lvi. 18: Is. lviii. 6). **Violence**] Nineveh's chief sin (Nah. iii. 1). The Assyrian records are nothing but a register of military campaigns, spoliations, and cruelties [*Layard*]. "Nineveh and Babylon." **9. Tell**] (cf. Joel ii. 14): to act on a mere possibility of mercy, an instance of strong faith in idolaters. We have better hope of pardon (Job xxxiii. 27: Jer. xxxi. 18). **10.**] God saw and removed judgment threatened; but there was no change in him (Num. xxiii. 19: Jas. i. 17). This repentance showed a susceptibility in the Ninevites for the word of God, and a willingness to forsake ungodly ways. They reprove and condemn many more highly privileged (Luke xi. 32).

HOMILETICS.

JONAH A SIGN TO THE NINEVITES.—*Chap. III.* 1, *and Luke* xi. 30.

Jonah would obey the second commission with renewed strength and Divine authority. He would appear in Nineveh as a *sign*, an outward proof of a Divine purpose in his life and work (cf. Luke xi. 30).

I. A sign of God's mercy towards men. As in a mirror, we see much of God and men, of sin and grace, in the history of Jonah. God proved that he was reconciled. 1. In *forgiving sin.* 2. In *restoring a backslider.* 3. In *reinstating a runaway prophet.* If we abuse the confidence of our fellow-creatures, they seldom forgive and employ us again. But God freely forgives, restores to favour after rebellion, and grants commission to unworthy servants. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; return unto me, for I have *redeemed* thee." **II. A sign of God's inflexible justice towards men.** God's servant must be punished and corrected. The sincerity of his penitence, and the honour of his God, must be vindicated. Nineveh must be threatened, and her sin

forsaken. Pardon gives no licence to disobedience. Neither the righteous nor the wicked can sin with impunity. God will be glorified in the life of his people, and the law magnified in the destiny of nations. **III. A sign of God's unchangeable purpose towards men.** God's plans are made in wisdom, and must be accomplished. He does not alter them to gratify the whims and caprice of man. "He is of one mind, and who can turn him?" Nineveh must be warned, and Jonah must go. All pleas and excuses are in vain. God gives to every one his work, and expects him to do it. If he runs away he must be fetched back. Treachery and cowardice God has determined to scourge. "He that knoweth his Master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."

The Second Call.—*Verses* 1, 2.

If Jonah doubted whether after sin like his he would ever be restored to favour and service again, he had not long to wait for an answer; for "The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time." This second call was—

I. Divinely given. The prophet might be ready, but he had need to be certain that God required him to go. If we are willing, we require instruction in duty. The spring of action is not mere religious feeling, but apprehension of God's word. Emotion will not ensure consistent life, without faith in Divine truth. God had to speak again. "The first verse," says Luther, "is therefore written that we may bear in mind that nothing is to be undertaken without God's word and command. For the first command of God having been violated by disobedience, had not God renewed it, Jonah would not have known whether he should do it or not." **II. Urgent to immediate service.** "Arise, go," are terms of incitement, and indicate that he was not girded for work, but resting in contentment and ease. 1. *The duty was imperative.* The more quickly we perform, the better for our souls. Delays are signs of distrust, and impeachment of Divine wisdom. We must prove the sincerity of our profession by prompt obedience. "Be ready to every good work." 2. *The communication was suspended.* The exact message seems not to be given at first. Immediate departure to Nineveh was required, and further revelations were delayed. God thus cultivates the dependence and tries the faith of his servants. His own authority in prescribing duty must be sufficient. His simple word is entitled to respect and compliance. Present duty should be enough for us. God will give enlarged views, greater strength, and more consolation, if we practise what we already know. "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know," &c. **III. Specific in directions.** 1. *The destination was still the same.* "To Nineveh, that great city." The trial is not abated, the dangers are not hidden. He is again reminded that it was a great, proud, and heathen city, to which he was sent. A city whose inhabitants were pre-eminently wicked and violent, and whom he was to threaten with speedy and complete ruin. But God had given Jonah proofs of his love, and Jonah should give not less evidence of his obedience. 2. *The message would be given him.* "The denunciation that I shall speak to thee." He was not to concern himself about his message and its results. That would be given to him when he was ready for it. He is to add nothing, nor diminish nothing. The Christian minister is not left to his own discretion, nor must he study to gratify the taste of the people. He must preach the Word—the message from God to him—earnestly and faithfully. If he tries to explain away or soften down what is severe to the ungodly, "he takes upon himself a double responsibility—responsibility for the salvation of the souls entrusted to him, and responsibility for his own disobedience." Many may speak to us smooth things, but we must not please men, for how can we then be servants of God? Jonah must be faithful: (1) In the *matter* of his preaching. The unwelcome message must be delivered. Nineveh was to be denounced for sin. (2) In the *manner* of his preaching. He was to "*cry*." Cry in compassion for perishing men, as a proof of his own sincerity, to rouse a careless and sinful people. "Proclaim the

preaching that I shall bid thee." (3) *A second call summoned him.* Ingratitude and failure had disgraced his conduct. But God had chastised and forgiven him. His experience was a preparation for service. Before we can proclaim mercy to man we must receive it ourselves. Profound repentance and perfect restoration to Divine favour will qualify us for a proper discharge of duty. Repeated acts of grace to us are a ground of hope for others. Severe trials and deep sorrow are often forerunners of great trust and high distinction. "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit. *Then* will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. God does not utterly reject him who has failed once; but he rather gives him a new opportunity of correcting former faults [*Lange*].

The most prominent lesson in this verse is that *God gives to men successive opportunities for the accomplishment of their life-work.* We are not crushed by the weight of our first sin or failure. If so, few would have anything like hope for the future. Life would be a dreary foreboding, lest any message committed to our care should be neglected, and entail final condemnation. The world would be full of wretched mortals, upon whom would rest the woe of unfulfilled mission [*Exell*].

Ver. 2. Jonah would resume his work with a new obedience. 1. *As a sinful man,* whose sin had been eminently forgiven. He would accept his mission in a spirit of gratitude, reverence, and submission. 2. *As a prayerful man,* whose prayer had been eminently answered. Prayer answered was (*a*) a testimony to him of his sincerity and integrity; (*b*) It would inspire him with the assurance that he was not returning alone—that he had One who would carry him through all danger, and give him success in his work. 3. *As an afflicted man,* whose affliction had been eminently blessed. Like the Psalmist, before he was afflicted, he went astray, but was chastened and subdued. He knew the "goodness and severity of God," and was fitted to teach them to others [*H. Martin*].

The preaching. Nothing should be more sacred to the preacher of God's word than truth, and simplicity, and inviolable sanctity in delivering it [*Pusey*]. The grand doctrines of the New Testament are eternally fixed. We must preach them all, faithfully and fully; should we alter, add, or diminish, we do not preach unto the people the preaching which the Lord bids us. If, instead of this, we preach another gospel, we shall bring down upon us a curse and not a blessing [*Jones*].

HOMILETICS.

JONAH'S OBEDIENCE.—*Verses* 3, 4.

God's chastisement brings forth fruit, and secures dutiful obedience. Weak parents correct their children, and leave them to please themselves afterwards. The results of discipline are lost. Chastisement is an evil unless it produces obedience. "*Happy* is the man whom God correcteth."

I. **Jonah's obedience was prompt.** The command was "arise," and "Jonah arose." He consulted not his own interests as before. Impressed with the mercies of God, and the obligation of his vows, he promptly obeys. He goes in no restless, turbulent spirit. He is hearty and enthusiastic. We are commonly reluctant, especially when danger threatens. We are too formal and time-serving. True, ready obedience to God is liberty and blessedness. "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." II. **Jonah's obedience was complete.** He neither delayed nor stopped short of his destination. "He went to Nineveh." When he got there he lingered not at the gates, nor gratified curiosity by survey-

ing the lofty towers, the gorgeous temples, and the princely palaces. Neither did he modify his message, nor falter in its delivery. Before the mansion of the rich, and the doors of the poor, in the marts, and in the streets, he gave the alarm (Prov. i. 20). Like Caleb, we must follow the Lord *fully* (Num. xiv. 24), or *wholly*. This requires (*a*) decision of character, (*b*) unreserved obedience, (*c*) undaunted fortitude, (*d*) unwearied perseverance. "My foot hath held his steps, his ways have I kept and not declined." **III. Jonah's obedience was divinely directed.** "According to the word of the Lord." Fear, self-will, and prejudice had influenced him before; now God's law is supreme in his heart and life. Religion is the same now; for no man can guide himself, nor be a law to another. We require a rule, (*a*) Divine in its sanctions, (*b*) practicable in its requirements, (*c*) plain in its directions, and (*d*) beneficial in its results. God's "commands are not grievous," but easy and delightful; "in keeping them there is a great reward."

> "His adorable will let us gladly fulfil,
> And our talents improve,
> By the patience of hope, and the labour of love."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 3. *According*, &c. Did you ever pass through a painful crisis, a sore probation of patience, faith, or constancy, keeping in view all the while that your purpose and procedure, your temper and policy, should be "according to the word of the Lord"? And did you fail? No; and you never will fail while the desire of your heart, and the doing of your hand, are ruled and ordered thus. This is the essence of Christianity — the essence of faith [*Martin*].

Great city. Great cities have manifested *the pride of man*, in their erection, enlargement, strength, and splendour; *the corruption of human nature*, in the enormous mass of sin which they foster, having often proved moral pests; vortexes swallowing up the wealth of a nation, and vomiting out the crimes of mankind; and the *power*, *justice*, *and holiness of God*, in their total annihilation (Nah. iii. 8: Is. xiii. 19: Ezek. xxvii. 32—36) [*Sibthorp*]. **Nineveh**, the city of God. God cares also for the heathen (2 Kings v. 1: Jer. xxv. 9) [*Luther*].

Ver. 4. Speak promptly, and delay not. In God's kingdom every moment is precious. The time when he puts his word in thy mouth is the right time; not that which thou fanciest for thyself [*Lange*].

1. God is able to reach and overthrow the greatest persons or places when he has a controversy against them. 2. The Lord often sees it fit, in great wisdom, to conceal any thoughts of love to a people, and holds out only threatenings and severity to induce them more seriously to repent [*Hutcheson*].

If God had meant unconditionally to overthrow them, he would have overthrown them without notice. *Yet*, always denotes some long-suffering of God" [*Pusey*].

HOMILETICS.

JONAH'S PREACHING.—*Verses* 4, 5.

We linger not on the stir and excitement which the preaching of Jonah would create. Business would be suspended, and crowds would gather round him. The brief and alarming cry would toll forth, *yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown*. Here we have a description of Jonah's ministry.

I. It was divinely suggested in its matter. "The preaching that I bid thee." He carried no philosophy or scientific theories, no inventions of his own; but uttered the denunciation given him. The minister may not be specially guided

like the prophet and the apostles, but a revelation is given from God. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." The mind of God is discovered in the Scriptures. Here "God speaks much, and man little," says Chrysostom. We must preach not morality, but the gospel. **II. It was intensely earnest in its spirit.** Jonah was no statue in the streets, but a living man. "The spirit and manner of a minister often affect more than the matter," says Cecil. "To feel is the readiest way to the hearts of others." "All men are orators when they feel; the language of the heart has an unction and an energy which no eloquence or sublimity can reach," says Bishop Hopkins. The words of Channing are weighty—"Earnestness should characterize the ministry; and by this I mean, not a louder voice or a more vehement gesture; I mean no tricks of oratory; but a solemn conviction that religion is a great concern, and a solemn purpose that its claims shall be felt by others. The life and sensibility which we would spread should be strong in our own breasts. This is the only genuine, unfailing spring of an earnest ministry." There must be no weakness of heart, no feebleness of effort. "*Cry* against it." **III. It was wisely practical in its aim.** Jonah intended and earnestly desired to produce a reformation of life. If the preacher is to be a man of power he must arrange his thoughts, point his language, and embue his spirit with unction. He must get at the consciences of men. An ancient father wept at the applause given to his sermons, felt that his words had not gone deep enough, and exclaimed, "Would to God they had rather gone away silent and thoughtful." Nathan said to David, "*Thou* art the man." The truth must be driven home, the heart searched, and men roused to repentance. The word must strike and stick. One remarks that "every action is done by the touch." In preaching, this doctrine is true. Massillon's hearers carried away the arrows fastened in their consciences, thought themselves to be singled out, and never regarded others. Peter's audience "were pricked to the heart" by his earnest practical appeal. **IV. It was wonderfully successful in its results.** Nineveh penitent is not only a splendid specimen of the power of the Divine word, but a wonderful achievement of an earnest man in proclaiming it. What Demosthenes did in the Athenian Senate, what Augustine, Chrysostom, and Lüther achieved in days of old, may be done yet by the right men. The revivals of Pentecost, of Whitfield and Wesley, are not to be regarded as isolated facts beyond accomplishment now. The moral need is the same, and the word of God can satisfy it. Multitudes remain untouched by the most successful preacher. In our largest cities are people living in idleness and vice. The preacher must go forth to warn and urge men to repentance, lest while they "cry peace and safety, sudden destruction come upon them."

> "The great proclaimer, with a voice
> More awful than the sound of trumpet, cry'd
> Repentance, and heaven's kingdom nigh at hand
> To all baptized" [*Milton*].

Nineveh Warned and Nineveh Reformed.—*Verses* 4—8.

Jonah's message was like a thunderbolt in the guilty city. It was a short, most impressive, and successful sermon. It produced results which the preaching of Noah for 120 years did not produce, and which have never been equalled since.

I. Nineveh warned. Jonah had no long address to give, nor many persuasions to offer. He had only to repeat one terrible denunciation. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh overthrown." 1. *The judgment was great.* "Overthrown." Overthrown by neighbouring nations whom they had made enemies by oppression? by conspiracy, revolt, and massacre within? by floods, fire, or brimstone from heaven? by earthquake shivering its defences, overturning its proud palaces, and burying everything in ruins? None can tell. God has evils to let loose, arrows in his quiver, which men know nothing of. A guilty conscience forebodes the worst of judg-

ments. No plan can defend, and no city escape, when he determines to punish. 2. *The judgment was imminent.* Only "forty days." It may begin before they are over, but destruction will be complete at the end of them. It is a fact that great cities and kingdoms have been unexpectedly and suddenly overthrown. Sodom and Gomorrah, Nineveh and Babylon, are solemn warnings in history. Shortness of time between threatening and execution should give weight to the message, and motives to repentance. 3. *The judgment was morally necessary.* Nineveh was reaping what she had sown. This death suspended over the heads of nearly a million people was not a physical nor political necessity. It was God's righteous act and vindication of moral law. . "The violence" of Nineveh demanded a moral check, a Divine judgment. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

"Justice, like lightning, ever should appear
To few men's ruin, but to all men's fear" [*Swenam*].

II. Nineveh reformed. Sometimes searching appeals, solemn warnings, and striking events, leave no influence behind them. But, in Nineveh, a revolution happened without bloodshed and strife, memorable in its history. 1. *It was repentance springing from a right principle.* They "believed God." Believed in his existence and government over the universe; believed in his purpose and power to carry it out. They believed in his justice and mercy towards men. They believed Jonah's word to be a message from God to them. The approaching judgment was real, and though no promise of mercy was expressed, yet they looked to God in faith. If men would believe in God, social corruption would be checked; selfishness and ambition would cease to rule; hatred, violence, and murder would be cured. 2. *It was repentance encouraged by the royal court.* Alarm and sorrow may fill the city, and the king and courtiers be exempt. But mighty potentates cannot always be secure. In the greatest despotism, a popular movement cannot be altogether disregarded. The *word* must come to the king. Truth will besiege the palace-gates, and the monarch who defies it will lose his kingdom and crown. This king was the most powerful and despotic of the day. But he is subdued by a greater power than his own. He joins the people in confession and prayer, sets an example in reformation, and robes himself in "the king-becoming graces." 3. *It was repentance prevalent in all ranks.* "From the greatest of them even to the least;" "both man and beast" were influenced by the messenger. Kings and common people, serfs and priests, were moved, and bowed in humiliation before their offended God. The city was one in sin, and one in sorrow. Individual opinion and acts must be restrained for the common good. The earnest cries of the people, and the lowing of the hungry cattle, adds solemnity to the scene (Esther iv. 1—4: 2 Chron. xx. 13). "Say unto the king and to the queen, Humble yourselves, sit down: for your principalities shall come down, even to the crown of your glory." 4. *It was repentance marked by signs of sincerity.* Faith will produce works, true penitence will evidence itself in amendment of life. (1) It was accompanied by *fasting.* Man and beast were to abstain from food. The irrational creatures which share the effects of sin, and minister to the wants of man, were to excite him to mourning, and add to the general depression. Nineveh was to learn, as we should, not to sin by ill-treatment of them, nor to forget that in their present condition we find a memorial of guilt, and a reason for humiliation. This fast (*a*) was universal, (*b*) and publicly proclaimed. If fasts are not specially enjoined by God, yet cities and nations may find it helpful to set apart days of fasting and prayer. (2) *It* was accompanied by putting on *sackcloth and ashes.* All classes united in religious duties, confessed guilt, laid aside their ornaments, and prayed to God for deliverance. There was a *visible* expression of sorrow in the rough, dark, coarse garb which reproves mourning apparel fashionable in cut, elaborate in ornament, and unsuitable in colour. (3) *It* was accompanied by *outward reformation.* They did not think of mocking God by merely abstaining from food, and changing their dress. Outward forms convict

of hypocrisy if not followed by change of heart and conduct. "Let them turn every one from his evil way," &c. Every one had an evil way, and the proclamation was a general acknowledgment of it. The king and the court specify one notorious sin. "*The violence* that is in their hand" (cf. Nah. ii. 11, 12; iii. 19). Special iniquity, "besetting sins," must be given up. All are exhorted to individual repentance and amendment of life. "Cease to do evil, and learn to do well." (4) It was accompanied *by earnest prayer*. (*a*) They were to *cry*. Feeling, not form, was required. (*b*) To cry *vehemently* with all their strength and soul. (*c*) To *God*, not to idols, which they worshipped; to the true God who alone can help them. Sloth and indifference are unbecoming in fasting and prayer. Some professed Christians depend upon punctual attendance, formal ceremonies, and ecstatic feelings. "Rend your hearts, and not your garments." Religious duties should be serious and earnest, sincere, and acceptable.

NINEVEH'S REPENTANCE: ITS ORIGIN AND NATURE.—*Verses* 5—9.

The repentance of Nineveh is one of the most singular events in history. A great and proud city suddenly smitten into the most profound humiliation, from the greatest of its inhabitants to the least—from the king on the throne to the meanest citizen,—is a spectacle to which history affords no parallel. Cities, countries, and communities have oftentimes, with not a little unanimity, given themselves to humiliation and fasting. But there is no event on record that can at all be compared with the fast and repentance of Nineveh. The repentance of Nineveh may be considered—*first*, in its essentials; and *secondly*, in its circumstantials. We confine our attention to the essentials. Here the **origin and nature** of this repentance calls for consideration.

I. The **origin** of Nineveh's repentance. 1. *First*, This repentance was prompted by faith. They believed Jonah to be a messenger from God; and they believed his message. The hand of God is seen in this, and his power and gracious influence on their hearts. Observe how their faith wrought in a manner suitable to the position in which they were placed. "They proclaimed a fast." Generally, faith worketh according to the nature of the thing believed. If that which is believed be something dreadful and alarming, it worketh by *fear;* and if any possibility of escape seem left, it prompts to the embracing of whatever means may realize it. This element of fear was the leading element in the repentance of Nineveh. "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his *fierce* anger, that we *perish* not?" 2. *Secondly*, an element of hope mingled to bestir them to exertion. Absence of hope excludes possibility of repentance. Had they viewed their doom as inevitable they would have been paralysed, infuriated, or still more estranged from God. Some faint hope remained. "Who can tell if God will turn?" &c. The Ninevites might gather hope,—(1) From the general consideration that all threatenings are warnings; uttered, in order, if possible, not to be executed. (2) From the history of Jonah himself. They knew of his original commission, disobedience, pursuit, punishment, and forgiveness. He was a sign to them. They saw in his deliverance hope of forgiveness through penitence and prayer. II. The **nature** of their repentance. The city underwent a sudden and striking reformation. Their haughtiness and pride were abased; their contempt of God abandoned; their luxury, cruelty, violence, and unrighteousness were given up. And God looked on with approbation. Such is the fast that the Lord calls for; not a formal, ceremonious, outward solemnity; but a spiritual and moral reformation, outwardly evidenced and certified by new obedience. This affords a proof of God's unspeakable goodness, and an encouragement to sinners to repent and turn to God [*Martin*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 6. *The humbled court.* The rich and the great are not often penitent before God. Those who enjoy the good things of this life feel no need of religion. Not many mighty, not many noble, are called (1 Cor. i. 26). It is said that the Countess of Huntingdon thanked God for the letter "*m*" in this text. I. *A court influenced by the preaching of the Word.* The Word has strange effects in places, and upon men, that are most unlikely. Where we look for little, God can create much. The successor of a proud race of tyrants feels the truth proclaimed by a forlorn man, trembles in spite of walls and guards, in the presence of courtiers and nobles (Ps. lxxvi. 12: Jer. xiii. 18). II. *A court setting the example in self-reformation.* In all kinds of governments the court has a mighty influence. Its fashions and etiquette prevail, its laws and religion are the standard of the people. Here the court was in harmony with the spirit of the people. Rank, station, and wealth were nothing to the safety of the city. The authority of God was supreme in the palace; and in the fast and the prayers the king and princes took the lead in its acknowledgment. Rank is truly kingly when ennobled by Divine grace.

This great king could not but know himself to be a great sinner; and that his sins had done much hurt:—1. *By imputation:* for the people oft pray for their rulers' follies, as in David's days (2 Sam. xxiv.). 2. By *imitation:* for magnates are magnets, they draw many by their example; and as bad humours flow from the head to the body, so do bad rulers corrupt the rest [*Trapp*].

Ver. 8. Man in his luxury and pride would have everything reflect his glory, and minister to pomp. Self-humiliation would have everything reflect its lowliness. Sorrow would have everything answer to its sorrow. Men think it strange that the horses at Nineveh were covered with sackcloth, and forget how, at the funerals of the rich, black horses are chosen, and are clothed with black velvet [*Pusey*].

The mighty cry. The Easterns are given to expressions of feeling in anger, sorrow, or devotion. But this cry denotes—1. *Intense earnestness:* not merely asking or seeking, but a cry. An agony, as one in deep distress, or intently engaged in solemn pursuit (Gen. xxxii. 24—26). 2. *Deep fervour.* It was not only a cry, but a *mighty* cry. There was deep contrition for sin, and strong desire for pardon. Faintheartedness and feeble prayers gain no blessing. The effectual fervent prayer avails much. The prayer that stirs and labours for its ends (Jas. v. 16: Heb. v. 7). 3. *Great confidence.* They believed that God *could* and *would* help them. They turn away from idols, and look to the God of mercy. 4. *Great perseverance.* Not once, but continually, did they cry, and felt the necessity of Divine protection day by day. We must always come to God humbly, fervently, and incessantly. "O Lord, to Thee will I cry."

Nineveh's repentance. Its nationality. Its expressions. Its efficacy [*Martin*].

The repentance of the Ninevites a model of a genuine national repentance. 1. It hears God's proclamation, and asks not why? (vers. 1—4). 2. It springs from faith, and is accompanied by faith (vers. 5—9). 3. It bows itself under the curse of the common guilt, and not a single person asks, "How much have I deserved?" (ver. 6). 4. It is united with the purpose of amendment [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

WHO CAN TELL?—*Verse* 9.

This was the forlorn hope of Nineveh. I shall notice three things.

I. The miserable plight in which the men of Nineveh found themselves. They were like those in the days of Noah; ate and drank, builded and planted

They fell into abominable sins, and their vices probably rivalled those of Sodom. But their boasting was cut off, and the sound of their mirth ceased. They discovered *their great sin*. Added to this, they had information as *to the shortness of their days*. "Forty days." The shortness of time should rouse us from slumber. The third thing was the *terrible character of the judgment*. **II. The scanty reasons they had for their hope.** Notice in Jonah's message, there was no proclamation of mercy. It was one short sentence of doom. Another thing would cut off their hope—they knew nothing of God except, it may be, some dreadful legends they had heard of his terrible acts. They lacked another encouragement which you and I have. They had never heard of the Cross. Jonah's preaching was very powerful, but there was no Christ in it. **III. We have stronger reasons to compel us to pray, and more comfortable arguments to urge us to trust.** Refer to the Scriptures. Remember David, Manasseh, and Saul of Tarsus. Your only hope lies in the mercy of God. Cling to it tenaciously. Remember, for your encouragement, God delights to save. Men object not to an expensive thing if it bring them honour; but if honour goes with a thing they are ready enough to do it. If God saves you, it will honour him. In prayer you ask for that which glorifies God and benefits yourself. Come, humble sinner, and cry to Christ, and he will have mercy upon thee [*Spurgeon*].

NINEVEH'S HOPE AND NINEVEH'S REPRIEVE.—*Verses* 9—10.

Hope is the gift of God, and a powerful principle in the human mind. It is the ground of support in trouble, and the mainspring of all effort. Fill the earth with hope, you fill it with light, life, and exertion. Where hope dies a man is buried in gloom; where it lives he looks forward, and strives for better things. "I do hope good days," says Shakespeare.

I. Nineveh's hope. "Who can tell?" are words which express some faint hope. But hope rests on some foundation. If not, it is rather presumption, and will disappoint. What were the grounds of Nineveh's hope? 1. *The light of nature would prompt them to hope.* It is something not to despair. *Nil desperandum* we cry. There is hope in a peradventure. But there are human feelings from which to judge of the feelings of God towards us. The tender parent is reluctant to punish the penitent child. We argue from the knowledge of God within us that he *may* be merciful.

> "The miserable have no other medicine
> But only hope." [*Shakespeare.*]
>
> "Hope springs eternal in the human breast." [*Pope.*]

2. *Jonah's message might encourage hope.* Why forty days? If God had been determined to destroy us, would he have given any time, any respite at all? There must be some secret thoughts of mercy, though not revealed to us. If God's messenger speaks of only judgment, God's conduct indicates forbearance. Let us indulge hope, improve our time, and seek deliverance by fasting and prayer. "Who can tell?" 3. *Jonah's history would encourage hope.* Here is a man whom they knew to have been disobedient, punished and saved. If God had mercy upon him, why not upon us? The forgiveness of some is a ground of hope to others. Paul was a pattern of God's mercy to men. Jonah was a sign, an outward symbol of hope, to Nineveh. At any rate, if they must perish, it could be no worse to perish in repentance than in wickedness. Who knows? was the anxious question. God only knew. If *they* acted thus in the darkness of heathen idolatry, what will become of many living in the light of gospel day? You have better hope than Nineveh. "If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die." **II. Nineveh's reprieve. The**

night begins to wear away, and the day to dawn on the city. They repent, and God repents of the evil which he had threatened. Nineveh *guilty* was destroyed by the penitence of its inhabitants, and Nineveh *reformed* was preserved by the mercy of God. "God repented of the evil," &c. This is not the place for the discussion of different questions concerning the character and the government of God. There is no change in his purpose, and no contradiction in his word. We are repeatedly assured that if we turn to him, he will be gracious to us (Job xxxiii. 27: Jer. xxxi. 18: Ezek. xviii. 27). Luther says: "I stick to this rule, to avoid such questions as entangle us with the throne of the Divine majesty as much as I can. It is much better and safer for me to stay down by the cradle of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has become man, than to puzzle one's self with the Deity." 1. *God observed the conduct of the Ninevites.* "God saw their works." He discerned their feelings, and noticed their acting. Their repentance, prayer, and fasting were approved by him. Though the amendment might be temporary and external with many, yet this showed some faith in his word, fear of his name, and desire for his mercy. He honoured, accepted, and rewarded it. There is no imposing upon God. He knows the heart, and observes the life. The finest profession without practice provokes him to anger; but the penitent suppliant moves him to mercy. "Return unto me, and I will return to you." 2. *God granted a reprieve to the Ninevites.* The whole city was preserved, and not one was put to death. "It was not *his* repentance altering their predicted fate, but *their* repentance accomplishing his compassionate purpose." For God to destroy a penitent, reformed people, would have been apparently as inconsistent as to save the wicked city in its impenitence. "That the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee; shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" When Nineveh afterwards filled up the cup of its iniquity, the threatened destruction came, and so complete was the overthrow that we are only now learning that the shapeless mounds of the desert covered the palaces of mighty kings. In its repentance Nineveh is an encouragement to seek God's mercy; in its overthrow a warning to all those who provoke his wrath. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, and to pull down, to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do them."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 9 Who can tell? In the development of this hope within the heart of Nineveh *we behold the truest exercise of faith in God.* It was not speculation, but a true confidence in the Supreme Being, as arbiter of the moral destiny of men, that inspired and retained this hope. In the development of this hope *we behold the first dawn of a new life.* The Ninevites are true to their better nature, humble and expectant. They work out in their conduct convictions placed by God in their hearts. Their characters rise into new light, and receive the beauty of a heavenly life. In the development of this hope *we behold a due recognition of the anger of God.* Had they not credited the Divine wrath, their faith would have been untrue to fact, and their reformation of character not according to the circumstances of the case. They believed in a Deity capable of anger and destruction; the former of which they had excited, and the latter of which they had narrowly escaped [*Exell*].

As soon as prayer took possession of them, it both made them righteous, and forthwith corrected the city which had been habituated to live with profligacy, and wickedness, and lawlessness. More powerful was prayer than the long usage of sin. It filled that city with heavenly laws, and brought along with it temperance, loving-kindness, gentleness, and care of the poor [*Chrysostom*].

Ver. 10. The repentance of God is included in his gracious decree. It is

the harmonizing of wrath and forgiveness, justice and love. Wrath is not the final end; but it has for its end and object, love. Woe to him who makes light of the wrath of God: he can never taste of love [*Lange*].

Works. 1. God looks not at outward performance. "Bring forth fruits *meet* for repentances." 2. To be acceptable to God we must renounce all sins. The sins of the city and the sins of individuals. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, God will disregard us (Ps. lxvi. 18). 3. God will bless feeble efforts to forsake sin and reform life. Temporal favours are a type of spiritual blessings, and temporary repentance an image of true penitence. If men through fear of judgment depart from evil and avert temporal evils, what will repentance unto life gain?

Learn:—1. That God may intend mercy amid darkness and judgment. 2. But men, sensible of their sins and desert, are often uncertain whether he will have mercy or not. The Christian in affliction and the penitent sinner seeking mercy, put the question, "Who can tell?" 3. By keeping the mind in suspense between hope and fear, judgment and mercy, God stirs up to greater diligence. Be not disheartened nor deterred from duty in trouble. God will hear prayer. The answer will be (*a*) certain, (*b*) seasonable, and (*c*) compassionate.

"Repentant tears." [*Shakespeare.*]

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Vers. 1—3. This is substantially the same commission, and yet different. The "second" call to a man is never exactly the same as the first. The third is never a repetition of the second. Another tone is in the voice of the speaker, firmer or milder. Other shades of meaning are in the message. If it is "the second time," still more if it is the seventh time, or the seventy-and-seventh time, there will be changes in the message corresponding with changes which time has brought in circumstances and in character. It may seem a refinement, but, properly understood, it is but a simple truth, that he never receives exactly the same command or invitation from God *more than once*. "If slighted once, the season fair can never be renewed" [*Raleigh*].

A great city. Nineveh covered a great extent of ground. Historians say that its walls were 480 stadia, or 60 miles, in circumference. It was great in population. Jonah mentions 120,000 who could not discern between their right hand and their left. It was great in splendour and power. "The researches in the mounds have astonished Europe with the barbaric grandeur of the statuary, and the full details of life and history sculptured on marble, or stamped in arrow-headed characters upon the bricks." But it was morally great to God on account of the human souls, and their spiritual condition. In God's sight, grandeur, territory, and architectural beauty, are nothing to immortal souls, and the influence which they exert. The material worlds, the sun with its satellites, are not so great as a man. Try to realize how great you are in the sight of God.

Ver. 4. *Yet forty days.* Delay in the execution of sentence is sometimes an encouragement to sin (Ecc. viii. 11); but gives space for repentance, and displays the long-suffering of God (see Ex. xxxiv. 5, 6: Ps. ciii., viii.: Joel ii. 13, 14: 1 Pet. iii. 20).

Ver. 5. *Fast.* They did not wait for supreme authority. Time was urgent, and they would lose none of it. In this imminent peril of God's displeasure, they acted as men would in a conflagration. Men do not wait for orders to put out a fire, or to prevent it from spreading. Whoever proclaimed a fast, it seems to have been done by acclamation; one common cry out of the one common terror [*Pusey*].

Vers. 5, 6. The message first kindles in the humbler hearts. Poor men, and humble men, do not think what immense compensation they thus have for poverty, straits, and toils, in being kept, as to natural condition, so much nearer God

and the powers of his gracious kingdom. God's messengers reach them easily. Rich men, and those standing on the elevated places of society, do not think how the earthly advancement is apt to be counterbalanced by the spiritual disadvantage [*Raleigh*].

"The pride of kingly sway." [*Shakespeare.*]

Vers. 7, 8. We double the greater part of our faults by the excuses which we make use of to justify them—excuses which are a kind of patches when a rent is made, far more unseemly and misbecoming than the rent itself [*Seed*].

"If hearty sorrow
Be a sufficient ransom for offence,
I tender it here; I do as truly suffer
As e'er I did commit." [*Shakespeare.*]

Violence.

"Grieved at his heart when, looking down, he saw
The whole earth filled with violence" [*Milton.*]

Ver. 9. *Who can tell?*

"They have more in them than mortal knowledge." [*Shakespeare.*]

Ver. 10. *Doom changed.* This is ever God's manner, when men change their deeds to change his doom; when they renounce their sins, to recall his sentence; when they repent of the evil they have done against him, to repent of the evil he had said he would do against them. Never was a man truly and inwardly humbled, but God in the riches of his special mercy (in Christ) truly pardoned him [*Bp. Sanderson*].

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Angry**] Lit. hot with anger; to burn inwardly: the verb usually restricted to anger, but (vers. 4 and 9) rendered to grieve. Jonah's vexation grew to anger. Nineveh's destruction would have been a warning to Israel, but God had preserved it, and he appeared to have no hope for the reformation of his country. **2. Word**] Saying or cogitation. *i. e.* Did I not say to myself? **Land**] Palestine. **Fled**] I prevented to flee, *i. e.* I endeavoured by flight to prevent. **Gracious**] (cf. Ex. xxxiv. 6; xxxii. 14: Joel ii. 13). **3. Take**] cf. Elijah's prayer (1 Kings xix. 4). **Better**] than live under the imputation of being a false prophet. **4. Well**] The Heb. adverbial, "Is thine anger justly kindled?" Art thou greatly or much angry? [*LXX.* and *Fairbairn*]. **5. Went out**] Some time before the forty days expire. **East side**] Definiteness in the picture. **See**] Watch what would happen, expecting Nineveh to fall by earthquake, or be burned like Sodom [*Pusey*]. **6. Gourd**] The "ricinus" or "palma Christi;" the word sig. an artificial covert, as a tent or booth; sometimes a shelter, in the preparation of which no art is used (Jer. xxv. 38: Job xxxviii. 40). **Exceeding**] Lit. glad with great gladness. **7. Worm**] Taken collectively for worms in Deut. xxviii. 39: Is. xiv. 11: may be here. The palma Christi in a short time produces caterpillars, and where these abound they strip the tree of its leaves in one night, and take away the shade. **8.** This not sufficient discipline. **Vehement**] Silent, *i. e.* deadly sultry east wind. **Wished**] Lit. he asked, as to his soul, to die. **9. Doest thou well**] This question comprises the meaning of vers. 9—11. **I do**] To the bottom of my soul, to weariness of life (cf. Matt. xxvi. 38). "I am very much grieved even to death" [*Fairbairn*]. **10.** Jonah's attention is directed to the contradiction in which he has fallen, by feeling compassion for the withering of the miraculous tree, and at the same time murmuring because God has had compassion upon Nineveh with its many thousands of living beings [*Keil*]. The shrub was the son of a night, and perished in a night: if he pitied this which he neither planted nor cultured, has God not greater right to pity creatures whom he has made? &c. **Pity**] Spared the gourd. **11. Spare**] Pity; Lit. to be affected by the sight of a thing; then to be concerned; take pity or compassion upon one. Nineveh contained an immense population, a great number of children; and "if this did not produce a suitable impression upon the mind of the prophet, the number even of irrational animals is adverted to, the latter being far superior in point of mechanism and utility to the shrub for which he was so much concerned" [*Elzaz*]. "What could Jonah say to this? He was obliged to keep silence, defeated, as it were, by his own sentence" [*Luther*]. The history breaks off abruptly, but an insight of God's compassion for all nations is gained. Mercy is the last note sounded. Let us attend to the sign of the prophet, and love him who said, "Behold, a greater than Jonas is here!"

HOMILETICS.

THE STRANGE DISPLEASURE.—*Verses* 1—4

God's servants should rejoice in the increase of his people and the success of their labours. Nineveh had repented, was saved and filled with rejoicing, but *one* individual was differently affected by the display of Divine mercy towards a guilty city. Sin lurks in those that have suffered most, that have undergone the severest discipline to wean them from it. A fretful man is—1. At discord with the joy of his fellow-creatures. 2. Opposed to the benevolent designs of God. Notice Jonah's strange displeasure. "It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry."

I. He sets the welfare of his own country above the interests of humanity. "He is an Israelite and a patriot. He loved his own people better than the Ninevites, and had no idea of God chosing more than one nation. He thought Nineveh the chief enemy which threatened his country. Behold it is spared, and likely to prosper! What will become of his brethren now? His Jewish pride rebelled, and he was angry." Professing Christians often cherish the same spirit, idolize their sect and creed. The sin of Jonah is a common sin. It is seen in the world's patriotism and the Church's bigotry; in all sectarianism and narrow-mindedness; in reluctance to missionary effort, and envy at the success of others. We cry, "Charity begins at home;" refuse to do God's work ourselves, and do not like it done by others. The disciples glorified God on Peter's report. "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." **II. He frets at the mercy of God to others.** He would rather have his own will. God's dealings with Nineveh did not please him. When self is exalted, and God's Providence thwarts our wishes, we are displeased. God does not gratify our whims, hence we fret and complain; we get peevish and angry with everything about us. "The times are out of joint." This temper darkens sunshine, corrodes enjoyment, scorns gratitude, and banishes happiness from every place. Is God's will not right, and are his ways not perfect? "Should it be according to thy mind?" **III. He attempts to justify his past conduct.** "Was not this my saying?" &c. We have here the reason for his flight to Tarshish which he is ready to excuse. He *hastened*, tried to be beforehand with God, to circumvent and defeat his designs. What folly and impiety to justify this! Why should we be ashamed to acknowledge error, and forsake a wrong when detected in it? The true penitent will sink self, think more of God's truth than his credit; be ready to confess all and excuse nothing. But for the belief that he would have mercy upon Nineveh, Jonah tells God that he would have obeyed the first commission. When men insist that they have done right, and call up sins which should have been forgotten, and for which they have been chastised, they display ignorance, pride, and self-conceit. 1. They make themselves *disagreeable*. Everybody dislikes a man that always claims to be right, that can never be taught nor corrected. 2. They are a *curse* to society. Their example and influence are pernicious. They are never satisfied with the ways of Providence. God's plans are always wrong, and his mercy upon others thrown away. How abominable is self-assertion, self-justification, and self-will. "I knew beforehand what would happen, therefore I shall please myself now!' **IV. He becomes impatient of life itself.** "Take, I pray thee, my life from me,' &c. This is the impatient wish of petulance and discontent, not the pious desire of Paul and God's people (Luke ii. 29: 1 Cor. v. 1—3: Phil. i. 18—23). But in this rash petition the Prophet stands not alone. Failure in business, disappointment in love, treachery of friends, and perplexing providences, cover the sky with clouds, and oppress the spirit with gloom. Moses and Elijah, Job and Jeremiah, prove that temptations to such desires are powerful in the best of men. Men pray for death when not prepared to die. If life is not appreciated, death is not desir-

able. This desire chills our best affections, and cherishes our meanest interests. It indicated—1. *Lack of faith in God.* God's plans were better than Jonah's. He should have believed in the wisdom of God. 2. *Ingratitude for his own forgiveness.* God's mercy towards himself should have made him tender-hearted to others, and glad to see their repentance.

"Anger is a short fit of madness" [*Tillotson*].

A Gracious God.—*Verse* 2.

Jonah seems to think that God was more merciful than just. But the justice of God is a proof and an exhibition of his love. Mercy and truth blend together like rays from the sun, to give life and light to men. This character of God is described in law, prophets, and psalms. It is a memorial and manifestation of God to all generations.

I. God is gracious in essence. "Thou art a gracious God." God has the disposition to goodness. He is gratuitously benevolent. This sheds lustre upon his nature and light upon a fallen world. He seeks to subdue the enmity of man, and allure wanderers back. He needs nothing to excite his love. His very nature is gracious. "God *is* love." Moses wondered how God could show mercy and do justly; desired some greater insight into the Eternal Mind, and longed to do his duty to a disobedient people (Exod. xxxiii. 17—19). But Jonah made the revealed character of God a ground for upbraiding men and neglecting duty. How sublime the contrast between God's mercy and man's ways. "My ways are not as your ways," &c. **II. God is gracious in acts.** As the fountain, so the streams. The acts of God partake of the character of God. Benevolent in nature, he is benevolent in act and design. He wills not that any should perish. We are apt to measure him by our own feelings, and picture him as malevolent and vindictive. 1. He is *merciful.* Merciful to the miserable and undeserving. Ever disposed to relieve the suffering, pardon the guilty, and dispense happiness. 2. He is *slow to anger.* He is not passionate and easily provoked. He restrains his wrath, and many a time turns away his anger. He deals not with men according to their iniquity, nor rewards them according to their sins. He is reluctant to execute sentence, and spares offenders. 3. He is of *great kindness.* Having long patience and forbearance; allows time for repentance, and seeks to pardon and save. *Great* kindness is seen in great patience in provocation; in great gifts upon the unworthy, and innumerable blessings upon the just and unjust. "His mercy *endureth* for ever." 4. *He repents of the evil.* Though he threatens, he does not often strike. When the evil has been wholly or partially inflicted, he will repent of it and replace it with good if the sinner returns to him. Thus all patience and long-suffering, all mercy and forgiveness, are traced up to God. He finds reason in himself alone for sparing the guilty and saving the penitent. "Not for your sakes do I this, be it known unto you, O house of Israel, but for mine own name's sake."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. *Displeased.* Displeasure indicates—1. *Lack of self-government.* It was a proverbial saying of the pious Mede that "he who cannot hold his tongue, can hold nothing." 2. *Lack of reverence towards God.* We should consider what God requires from us, and not what he wants to do with us. Do we honour God in feeling and action? We have *known* him, but not practised what we have known. 3. *Lack of love to men.* Jonah might not be grieved to see that mercy displayed to others, of which he shared so greatly himself—might not with the ungodly pine away because God was honoured in the repentance of Nineveh; but he was not in harmony with the interests of his fellow-creatures. God *pardoned* the city, "but it *displeased* Jonah."

Jonah's sin—1. Sin against the *brightest illumination.* He "knew," but sinned against the light of nature, the voice of conscience, and the revealed will of God. 2. Sin against the *greatest mercies.* His life was crowned with loving-kindness and tender mercies. The pre-eminent mercies of God fail to persuade men to forsake sin and serve God. 3. Sin against the *greatest judgments.* Judgments had blended with mercy, but corrections had not conquered his corruptions. How hard to overcome pride and petulance within us! But to this day men, like Pharaoh, harden themselves against God. "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?"

Ver. 2. *Jonah's prayer. I. Its spirit.* Petulant and unsubmissive; most ungrateful and selfish. It is a miserable temper, painful to one's self, and disagreeable to others. The greatest debtors should be the most thankful men. *II. Its purpose.* "Take away my life." What for? Is it of no more service? Let God judge of that. He bestows it; give it to him in return. There is grace enough for us and others. When we work in a good cause, and save great cities, life is noble, and should be dignified and preserved. Those who wish to leave life because they cannot have their own way are not fit to meet God. *Here is Jonah's integrity and Jonah's safety.* 1. *Integrity.* He is no enemy, but a friend and child of God, notwithstanding his perplexity. He cannot rest in distance from God. Sick at heart, he pours out complaint to him. In every prayer of God's children there is a mixture of sin. The mixture *here* is conspicuous and alarming. There is, however, an element of grace, a secret seed of faith and submission in making God the counsellor and referee. 2. *Safety.* But for this he would mentally and spiritually have fled again *from* God as before. Now he flees *to* God. He does not seek a refuge; he makes God his refuge; tells him the grounds of alarm; expostulates and seeks to make his case clear before God. Though there is excess, violence, and inexcusable haste and passion, yet God condescends to his prayer, stained as it is by grievous infirmity [*H. Martin*]. He prayed in a tumult, as if reproving God. We must necessarily recognise a certain amount of piety in this prayer of Jonah, and at the same time many faults. There was so far piety in it, that he directed his complaints to God; for hypocrites, even when they address God, are nevertheless hostile to him. But Jonah, when he complains, although he does not keep within proper bounds, but is carried away by a blind and vicious impulse, is nevertheless prepared to submit himself to God [*Calvin*].

Ver. 3. *It is better to die,* &c. Death as a remedy for the ills of life, in weariness, impatience, disappointments, and perplexing providences. 1. *It is only an imaginary remedy.* 2. It would only increase the evil. It would not relieve distress, nor bring extinction. The grave cannot calm the soul, and hush its sorrows. "Hence death," says one, "would only have led Jonah from the shadow of his trouble to its very centre, where its sad meaning would have been known to him." Paul had "great heaviness and continual sorrow," desired to be with Christ, which was better than remaining here; but he did not pray for death in all his labours and persecutions, for his life seemed needful to the Church on earth.

"He sins against this life who slights the next."
[*Young.*]

Here is at least no craven love of life! no clinging to meat and drink, and mere foothold on the ground. This wounded spirit, realising its mortality amid change and adversity, rises disdainfully above the mortal pathway, and asks to be liberated for the last flight to immortality and heaven. Hezekiah "wept sore" when the message came to him, "Thou shalt die and not live." Jonah here prays, "Let me die—of life I have had enough. Life is nothing to me without its uses." The Prophet's attitude is nobler than the king's [*Raleigh*].

"What is't to die?
To leave all disappointment, cares, and sorrow,
To leave all falsehood, treachery, and unkindness,
All ignominy, suffering, and despair,
And be at rest for ever" [*Longfellow*].

HOMILETICS.

Divine Reproof.—*Verse* 4.

Jonah had ground for joy and not for grief. God expostulates with him and leads him to reflection. The interrogative form proves the condescension and wisdom of God.

I. The condescension of God. God did not upbraid the prophet for ingratitude and self-will. But he sought to relieve an overburdened spirit, rouse a dormant conscience, and melt an impenitent heart. When we retire from duty in fretfulness, God reasons with us. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" When we indulge in envious thoughts of Providence, and hatch imaginary ills, a voice speaks, "Doest thou well to be angry?" God cares for his servants, and seeks to relieve them. "The Lord thinketh on me." **II. The wisdom of God.** Jehovah did not give the verdict, but called upon Jonah to assign a cause for anger, or by silence condemn himself. On earth men are left to judge themselves, to pass sentence on their own conduct. They are completely in the power of God, and he need not condemn now. He requires voluntary obedience. To secure this, and prepare us for the day of account, he enlightens the mind, quickens the conscience, and continually appeals to each—"Doest thou well?"

The Folly of a Fretful Mind.—*Verses* 4 *and* 9.

There is here no condemnation of lawful anger. As a natural emotion, anger is legitimate and useful. "Be ye angry and sin not." The blame is against the *cause* of it. It was the zeal of false patriotism; passionate grief excited by an act of Divine mercy.

I. Doest thou well to be angry without any real cause for thine anger? The ground is imaginary. Thy grief is unnecessary and unreasonable, unjust and wicked. One half of trouble rises from groundless causes. We picture the worst, and our jealousy is needless. Our reason for displeasure is future, of our own portending, such as events may negative and disappoint Think seriously whether you do right in being angry. Control indignation in principle, purpose, and degree. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." **II. Doest thou well to be angry when the dealings of God with thee teach thee to be thankful?** Jonah's temper was at variance with his mercies and position as God's servant. We might have expected gratitude from one so highly favoured. But thankfulness seldom keeps pace with mercies. Those who receive most do not always make the best return. God's grace should dilute or remove the acid in our temper, teach us to bear with those who are reformed, and make us conscious how rough and sinful we *ourselves* are in the sight of God. **III. Doest thou well to be angry when the consequences before God and man are most serious?** 1. It *excites the anger of God.* It is presumption and self-assertion, disobedience to his will, and impatience under his rule. The ungrateful can have no enjoyment of God's favours. They provoke him to take away what they have, and to give less in the future. Their fretfulness cannot improve their circumstances. God's will is supreme, and must be done. "Is thine eye evil because I am good?" 2. It *is never beneficial to man.* If anger is not good and just toward God, what can it profit man? It proves a man to be of narrow views and weak morals. (*a*) *Never beneficial to one who indulges in it.* An ill-temper is an affliction to its possessor, spoils his peace, prayers, and business. It distracts from his strength and beauty, and disqualifies for Christian blessing and work. (*b*) *Never beneficial to others.* It seems to be owing to temper that Ed. Burke quarrelled with Wilberforce and Fox, and gained the title of "the inconsistent and incomprehensible Burke." Exhibitions of passion delight the enemy and wound the friends, dishonour Christ and give false impressions of his religion. It leads us to imitate, repeat, and

perpetuate wrong. It should be checked, for it is both mischievous to oneself and to others. "Doest thou well to be angry?"

> "When anger rushes unrestrained to action
> Like a hot steed, it stumbles in its way" [*Savage*].

JONAH'S RETIREMENT.—*Verse* 5.

As soon as Jonah had delivered his message he left the city, remained outside on the east side, and built himself a temporary shelter. The report of the city's repentance reached him; dissatisfied with himself, and displeased with God's dealings, he had neither comfort in duty nor retirement.

I. The place of retirement. "The east side of the city, and there made him a booth." He was not unmindful of personal ease, takes time and bestows trouble to build a hut. We are often more concerned for our own comfort than for the interests of men. Selfishness is graven in the heart, drives men to grasp at shadows and not substance. It leads them to resign duty, quit the field of labour, and expect more than they get. Adam parted with his holy robe, lost the presence of his God, and tried to make up for the loss with his own device. Selfish ends and worldly devices are nothing more than booths in which men can never rest and find shelter. The path of obedience alone is the path of happiness. **II. The spirit of retirement.** Here we have a noble man, a servant of God, blind to the interests of men and the claims of duty through pride and personal feeling! Disappointed in labour, he wished to resign it; tired of life, he prayed to leave it. There he sat, in silence and disgust. Heaven smiles on the city, joy and gladness fills its streets, but Jonah walks into solitude with a sullen temper. He is at variance with God, regardless of man, and shut up in selfish aims. "Oh what a blessed thing it is to lose one's will," said Dr. Payson; "since I have lost my will I have found happiness. There can be no such thing as disappointment to me, for I have no desire but that God's will may be accomplished." **III. The purpose of retirement.** "Till he might see what would become of their city." Perhaps he did not wish its entire destruction, but he watched to see what would be done—if its repentance would last, and if after all God would fulfil the threat. Abraham interceded for Sodom, Christ wept over Jerusalem, and we should resemble these eminent patterns of compassion. But if our views of sin and God are clouded, if we value not the soul, and limit the mercy of God, we shall be indifferent to the moral condition of men. If, Nero-like, we do not play while the city burns, thousands may perish without a sigh or a prayer for their escape. We should have pity upon offenders, and haste to reclaim them. "Pulling them out of the fire."

THE DIVINE CORRECTION OF A FRETFUL MAN.—*Verses* 6—10.

God teaches not as man teaches. In God's school the lessons are mercifully given, and wonderfully adapted to our mind and circumstances. Here we have the Divine rebuke of Jonah's petulant temper.

I. God corrects by refreshing the physical nature. The gourd was prepared "to be a shadow over his head." The first lesson and cure of despondency is to remove fatigue and bodily weariness from over-work. Elijah's despondency was partly physical, and the angel brought him refreshment. Food and rest are required, and God seeks to quiet the mind by cooling the body. There is an intimate connection between both, and we often get at one through the other. Regard for the body is urged from the lofty nature and the important use of the soul. They are helpmates in God's service now, and will be in his kingdom above. Fretfulness, petulance, and irritability oftener spring from physical weakness than moral unloveliness. If God in providence deals mercifully we should not be harsh with such feelings. **II. God corrects by influencing the moral nature.** The method taken is worthy of special attention. Sensible signs teach spiritual

truths. A parable worked into the form of facts is given and interpreted by God himself. 1. *God speaks by symbol.* "The Lord *prepared* a gourd," for all the steps in the discipline of a good man are divinely ordered. Words merely might not have been sufficient. The lesson is brought home by means of symbol. Man has sympathy with nature, and God often touches this sympathy. Spring and autumn, summer and winter, beget kindred feelings in our hearts. When flowers bloom and trees shelter us, we rejoice; when beauty decays and plants perish, we grieve. God prepared a worm which devoured the gourd, exposed Jonah to the burning sun and the vehement wind, then there was a change of feeling. He fainted, complained to God, defended excessive grief, and enforced his preference of death to life. "I *do* well to be angry, even unto death." Jonah is now prepared, his moral nature is truly touched and displayed, and if he cannot rejoice in Nineveh's joy he must understand that God does. 2. *God speaks by verbal communications.* God now *speaks* to the Prophet, argues with him, and reasons from the less to the greater. Anything to break sullen silence is a blessing. The song of a bird, the voice of a child, and the ripple of a stream are often music to the soul; raise our thoughts from self to God. God holds up Jonah's feeling, makes *his pity*, not the life of the plant, the symbol of his love. Pity on a gourd for which he did not labour, the son of a night, and the existence of a day! because it pleased his fancy and served his wish! Did he want to spare this short-lived little shrub? shall not God, then, spare immortal souls, the work of his hands, and rejoice over the humbled, penitent city? Our sympathies with the beautiful and good may be right, while our moral nature is wrong. God trains this instinctive feeling of the mind, sanctions its validity, and exercises and makes it the type of his own procedure. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?"

Withered Joys.—*Verse 7.*

Man is capable of joy. True joys are only found in God. The worm of destruction gnaws the root of our best and most loved earthly joy. Every creature has its enemy, and death smites every gourd of life. Joys which specially decay may be noticed.

I. Joys which are sinful in their basis. If we regard our own ease and comfort, disregard the interests of men, and disapprove of God's ways, our joy is selfish and will soon decay. If we depend for happiness on anything beneath the soul we shall come to grief. **II. Joys which are gained without labour.** Jonah neither planted nor watered the tree which gave him shelter. Men often seize that which is cheap, and trust to that which costs them nothing. God is constantly teaching that nothing valuable is obtained without labour. The acquisition of lasting joy is not easy. It results, not from sulky labour and melancholy feeling, but from earnest duty and a peaceful heart.

> "Heaven sells pleasure; effort is the price;
> The joys of conquest are the joys of man" [*Young*].

III. Joys which are deceitful in their results. Jonah's joy sprang from bodily ease and sensual feeling. The comforts which removed his troubles were carnal and dying comforts. Our joys are often shadows of our sorrows. Whatever be their effect upon us, if they exclude God, and submission to him, all creation is ready to destroy them. It is not chance, but God in justice and love, who smites the gourd to free the heart. Wealth, friendships, and honours seem to quicken our joy and cause it to bloom in beauty and vigour; but they bring decay and vexation. When we expect shelter and rest, lo, a worm at the root!

> "Of joys departed
> Not to return, how painful the remembrance" [*Robt. Blair*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 6. "*Exceedingly glad*," and "exceedingly grieved." Extremes in human feelings—their causes and consequences. It is a law of the mind, verified in ourselves and others, to be susceptible of sudden transitions, elevated to-day and depressed to-morrow.

Ver. 7. Destruction is "prepared" by God as well as life; trouble as well as joy. And both are Divinely ruled with a view to the education and purification of human souls. Here are emblems of the closely-linked joy and sorrow of this mortal life. The *fine plant*, leafy green, types so well our comforts, successes, joys. The *single* day of shade it furnished to the heated Prophet speaks touchingly of the transciency of our pleasures. The *worm* reminds us that a small and mean creature may be a formidable enemy. The *place* of its operation, probably under the soil, shows us how powers and agents, invisible and unknown to us, can touch and smite in secret the springs of outward prosperity. The *time* when decay began—at the rising of the morning—makes us think mournfully how human helps and comforts often wither at the very season when they are most needed. How often when "the morning" of family life is "rising" are comforts swept away! Ah! how often is there removal of sheltering fatherhood, or nourishing motherhood, or both! The *utter loss* of what had given such intense enjoyment warns us not to set our affections passionately upon anything which *can* be utterly lost, but to lift our supreme affections to things above the sphere of the "worm" and the "moth," beyond the reach of the "rust" and the "thief" [*Raleigh*].

The *worm* teaches—1. That things which destroy our gourds are often *little things*. 2. That things which destroy our gourds are often *invisible things*. 3. That things which destroy our gourds are always *prepared* by God. Under his control the meanest and most invisible creatures can accomplish the most wonderful purposes. They destroy the largest armies, and demolish the strongest fortresses; they overturn thrones, and lay waste empires.

Earthly joys. It is *kind* in God to remove them, when he sees that his gifts are occupying our affections to the exclusion of the Giver. It is *lawful* for him to take them at any time. It will be *just* to do so, if we abuse and pervert them. Let us receive them with thankful acknowledgments of their Author, hold them with a readiness to relinquish them any moment, use them with carefulness and moderation to his glory, and seek that, whatever they are in kind and number, our affections may be set on things above [*Sibthorp*].

Ver. 8. In this verse we have exemplified the conduct of some good people under affliction. We find that the afflictions which come upon men are *Divinely commissioned*—that they are often very *severe*. "A vehement east wind." They are often *complicated*. Not only the "wind," but "the sun," beating upon Jonah's head. They often happen at the *most inopportune time*, and have often a most *exhaustive effect* upon those to whom they come. "He fainted." These afflictions often *occasion a complaining spirit*. It is better for me to die than to live [*Exell*].

Ver. 9. *Doest thou well?* I. The question put. 1. To reprove Jonah. 2. To convince him of his error; and 3 To bring him to a humble and obedient spirit. II. The answer given. Jonah had not dared to speak before verse 4, now he answers and defends his wicked spirit and conduct. We see the old spirit and pride with more *actual* sin and provocation. "I *do well*," &c. A fearful outburst! Resist passion at the first rising, else who knows whither it may transport us? "Passions," saith Fuller, "like heavy bodies down steep hills, once in motion, move themselves, and know no ground but the bottom."

"We oft by lightning read in darkest nights;
And by your passions I read all your natures,
Tho' you at other times can keep them dark."
[*John Crowne.*]

HOMILETICS.

God's Care for Children.—*Verse* 11.

The mention of children and cattle in the description of the city indicates more than its greatness, proves the tender mercy of God, and affords no ground for the defence of his innocent shrub. God estimates cities, not according to wealth and splendour, but the character of its population. "Here," says one, "was a reason for sparing the city, and for bringing the adults to repentance in order to save it."

I. Children have a distinct rank assigned to them. They are distinguished from *matter*, and raised higher than brutes. Hence they must not be looked upon as cumber or hindrance to the welfare of humanity. Many regard them in the mass, and give them no distinct rank in the scale of being. Christianity differs in sublime distinction from ancient Polytheism and modern materialism in its loving aspect towards little children—teaches that they are not to be regarded as incipient organisms in human form, but as immortal beings, and of celestial beauty. "For of such is the kingdom of heaven." **II. Children have special claims upon us.** Men talk of them as "*little* children," so many incarnate trifles or commonplaces of humanity. Such treatment is neither justified by religion nor reason. Life in its lowest forms involves mystery; but if we recognize infants as manifesting a Divine purpose, and taking a definite rank in creation, we shall feel that certain reverence is due to them. Their innocency is pleasing, and their influence powerful. Upon their character and training depend the happiness of society and the destiny of nations. Few parents are base enough to injure their children, but parental neglect and sinful apathy prevail in every home. Children's claims are forgotten or ignored, and we are still under the moral implication of Christ—"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." **III. God's mercy to children is an example to us.** Priority and prominence are given to the children, and God appeals strongly to Jonah's human sympathy. That heart must be desperately hard that cannot feel for the injury and death of infants. Herod's outrage brands him with infamy in every age. But God does not play merely upon Jonah's feelings. He shows his regard for children, and reveals his true character as a gracious God. Christ displayed Divine love by taking them into his arms and blessing them. God's providence over children should urge us to care for them. His pity for them in pain and danger should be a model for parental conduct, and an encouragement to cultivate true disposition of heart. Christ recommended true virtues; set a child in the midst of his disciples, and taught that Christian life was a life of childhood. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

God's Care for Oxen.—*Verse* 11.

In addition to children there were also "much cattle," of infinitely more value than Jonah's gourd, and perfectly innocent of the crimes of which the Ninevites were guilty.

I. Here we have an argument for mercy to beasts. The city must be spared for the sake of the cattle even. Little children and dumb creatures intercede for man and must be pitied. "Doth God take care for oxen?" Yes, to teach *us* to be merciful to them (1 Cor. ix. 9: Deut. xxv. 4). How unlike God are those who neglect them and inflict needless sufferings upon them. Men whom God preserves daily from the punishment of sin wreak their rage upon their beasts, starve and torture them for selfish ends, or kill them in sport and cruelty. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast; but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." **II. Here we have an argument for mercy to men.** God's care for cattle suggests his greater mercy to men. It is a perversion of sympathy when persons bestow

upon brutes an extravagance of kindness which they refuse to children and men. Stables and kennels are often more comfortable than cottages; animals are petted while the poor starve. "God would have us love and pity not merely our own gourds, but all his creatures—men, women, children, and even cattle—according to their respective worth in his sight." The selfish man shrinks up in envy and cold indifference, but "blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Here we have a picture of the weak protecting the strong, infants shielding the parents. Ungodly families are often spared for the sake of the little ones in them. Justice calls for the punishment of the wicked, but mercy delays lest the innocent should suffer with the guilty.

Many great and fruitful truths lie couchant here. It is manifest, for example, that infants are regarded by God as *personally innocent.* They inherit many of the consequences, but do not share *the guilt* of Adam's sin. God here seems to say: "What have *they* done?" They have had no part in the guilt of the city. Would you bring a storm of judgment upon *them?* It is manifest, also, that unconscious beings may have, really have, a great moral power and place in the universe. When men or women all through the city were "crying mightily to God," there was a cry mightier, although inarticulate, going up from six-score thousand unconscious suppliants. The infants of Nineveh did what all her armed men could not do—they helped to turn away the wrath of God, and to draw down his mercy. This reference to the infants tells us that *life is good.* It is implied that it is in itself a blessing—a thing to be desired to make one wise. The Prophet had said, "It is better for me to die than to live." In an indirect manner God says, "It is better to live than to die," better even for infants to live, although they might die without tasting the bitterness of death. Better to live, even in a place like Nineveh, where the wickedness is only arrested for a little, and not extinguished, than not to live at all [*Raleigh*].

The whole chapter is a wonderful exhibition of Divine mercy. I. Mercy is *displayed.* Displayed to Jew and Gentile, young and old. Mercy towards a guilty city, and an ungrateful servant. II. Mercy is *vindicated.* 1. Against the *ignorance* of man. 2. Against the *selfishness* of man. We substitute justice for love. It is true that God hates sin; but he is merciful, and prefers pity to punishment. As we do not see the world in the blackness of a thunder-storm, so we do not know God in the outpouring of his wrath. "Fear never made the childish nature good. March winds never made the buds blossom—only April showers; it is not the father's severity, but the mother's love, that makes the child repent."

The *mercy of God* concerns us infinitely. We are personally interested in this argument and in this demonstration, as much as Jonah, as much as the Ninevites. Is there anything else in which we have half the interest that we all have in this? This is the very foundation of our hope; it is the bright charter of our salvation. We enter only by this door. Without the mercy of God we are clean gone for ever. By this mercy we are spared. By this mercy, in its forms of forbearance, and forgiveness, and renewal, we hope one day to reach complete redemption [*Raleigh*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1. *Displeased.* Anger begins with folly and ends with repentance [*Maunder*]. Anger and haste hinder good counsel [*Fielding*]. Be on your guard against your temper. It will frustrate all your designs if you listen to it. It will make you lose the most important opportunities, and will inspire

you with the inclinations and aversions of a child, to the prejudice of your greatest interests [*Fenelon*].

Ver. 2, 3. *Life.* Live virtuously, my lord, and you cannot die too soon, nor live too long [*Lady Rachel Russel*].

"So weak is man,
So ignorant and blind, that did not God
Sometimes withhold in mercy what we ask
We should be ruined at our own request."
[*H. More.*]

Ver. 4, 5. *Dost thou well?* It would check our angry complainings under the afflictive hand of God, and turn them into praises for the very moderate measure of trial with which he visits us, to review our own vileness and desert of wrath, and the great grace shown towards us (Ezra ix. 13; Ps. ciii. 10; Job xi. 6) [*Sibthorp*]. The Divine Being does not always like to use extreme penalties, but the more gentle, that men may not only be disciplined by pain, but also by moral conviction. Hence God frequently comes to the human soul in the language of this verse, and says, "Dost thou well to be angry?" And this quiet method of correction is frequently effective, awaking in the soul thoughts that end in a return to reason and purity [*Exell*].

Ver. 7—9. The Lord's servants are under a continual course of instruction. Every circumstance of every day and hour has its proper lesson for them, which it is their duty, wisdom, and privilege to learn. The end of their instruction is entire sanctification and meetness for glory through conformity to the image of God. When they are refractory, as Jonah now was, God takes commonly some special method to recall them to duty, and pursue his object of their growth in grace [*Sibthorp*].

Ver. 9—11. The teachings of Nature, which unbelievers vaunt as all-sufficient, have never led mankind to a correct knowledge of God, nor produced holy feeling; and they never can. But they may prepare for the Word, and be used to convey it, illustrate it, and fix it in the memory. God schooling Jonah in patient, tender love, and through him preparing instruction for Israel and for us, uses Nature to prepare the way for the lessons of the Word. As when he sent Nathan to David with a parable, to make David condemn himself out of his own mouth, so to Jonah he sends the gourd and the worm, the wind and the sunshine, to prepare the way for making his better feelings condemn his worse. He will make his pity for the plant explain God's pity for Nineveh, and condemn Jonah's want of pity for that multitude of souls [*Mitchel*].

This wonderful book of Jonah has given us a picture of the human heart, not in its lowest degradation, but taught by revelation, restrained by conscience, influenced more or less by piety, but stripped of its disguises and company dress. God takes us behind the scenes to show us how in Nature his hand and purpose are working by storm and sunshine, fish and worm, and so puts a window for us in the heart of man. Jonah speaks out to God, and acts out before us, and writes down for us to read, without suppression, palliation, or extenuation, the sinful thoughts which other men have, but do not make known. We have at once a picture of God's character, and a mirror in which to behold our own [*Ibid*]. In the book of Jonah we have thus a panorama of historical facts, pregnant with the most important instruction. Its lessons constitute the staple of the teaching of the later prophets, and contain the leading thoughts which were developed in their writings, imbedded in the mind of Israel, and expounded by Christ and his apostles.

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

MICAH.

INTRODUCTION.

The Prophet. *Micah* is an abbreviated form of Micaiah, mentioned in Jer. xxvi. 18. He was a native of Moresheth-Gath, prophesied in Judæa, and must be distinguished from Micaiah, son of Imlah, in 1 Kings xxii. 8. Of his life we know nothing but what may be gathered from his book. The Prophet himself seems to allude to his name (ch. vii. 18); tradition has many stories about him, but we can only affirm that he belongs to the critical time in the latter half of the 8th century B. C.

The Period in which Micah lived may be gathered from the superscription. The reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah are given, *i. e.* 727—698 B. C. "At that time the Assyrian kingdom, just prior to its fall, recovered its power, under Salmanassar, and with irresistible might carried the profound commotions of God's judgments, predicted by Amos (chs. i. and ii.), over the peoples of Western Asia and even to Africa" [*Lange*]. "The Prophet's lively rebukes, together with the corresponding picture of Isaiah and other writers, give a description of the sins of the age He lingers in his prophecy among the towns of the maritime plain (the Shephēlah), where his birth-place lay. Among the few places of that neighbourhood, which he selects for warning and for example of the universal captivity, is his native village, 'the home he loved.' But the chief scene of his ministry was Jerusalem. He names it in the beginning of his prophecy as the place where the idolatries, and with the idolatries all the other sins of Judah, were concentrated. The two capitals, Samaria and Jerusalem, were the chief objects of the Word of God to him, because the corruption of each kingdom streamed forth from them. The sins which he rebukes are chiefly those of the capital. Extreme oppressio violence among the rich, bribing among judges, priests, prophets; building up the capital even by cost of life, or actual bloodshed; spoliation, expulsion of t powerless women and children from their homes; covetousness, cheating in dealings, pride. These, of course, may be manifoldly repeated in lesser places of resort and of judgment. But it is *Zion and Jerusalem* which are so built up with blood, and must be ploughed as a field. Especially they are the heads and princes of the people whom he upbraids for the perversion of justice, and for oppression. Even the good kings of Judah seem to have been powerless to restrain the general oppression" [*Pusey*].

THE BOOK Isaiah sweeps over all history, and sheds the light of prophecy over all nations; but Micah fixes on his own people, and prophesies against Israel (Samaria) and against Judah (Jerusalem). God will temper judgment with mercy. He will chasten Zion, but the Redeemer will come to Zion as a man "from Bethlehem of Judah," and as a Mighty Conqueror to subdue his enemies, and "Jerusalem will be the Mother Church of Christendom." The temple will be destroyed, but a nobler building shall rise out of its ruins, and the law shall be fulfilled in the gospel. *Its analysis.* It is divided into *three parts*, all beginning with *Hear ye.* (1st) Chs. i. and ii. (2nd) Chs. iii., iv., v. (3rd) Chs. vi., vii. "In the first the threatening of judgment predominates; in the second the announcement of the Messianic salvation; in the third there follows the *parænesis* or admonition to repentance and humiliation under the chastening hand of the Lord, in order to participate in the promised salvation. As this admonition rests upon the threat of judgment and promise of salvation in the two previous addresses, so does the allusion to the judgment contained in the words, "Then will they cry to Jehovah," &c. (ch. iii. 4), presuppose the announcement in chap. i. of the judgment about to burst upon the land, without which it would be perfectly unintelligible. Consequently there can be no doubt whatever that Micah has simply concentrated the quintessence of his oral discourses into the addresses contained in his book. This quintessence, moreover, shows clearly enough that our Prophet was not at all behind his contemporary Isaiah, either in the clearness and distinctness of his Messianic announcements, or in the power and energy with which he combated the sins and vices of the nation" [*Keil*]. *Its style.* "He stands next to Isaiah in force and freshness, continuity of expression, and in the plastic choice of words. In the arrangement of his thoughts, however, abrupt and fond of sharp contrasts, he reminds us more of his older contemporary, Hosea. The beautiful plan of his discourse is admirable" [*Lange*]. The diction is rigorous and clear, varied in rich figures, and derived from pastoral and rural life. The changes are sudden, frequently hidden by our version, for the simple connective (*vav*) is often rendered by some logical term as "therefore" (i. 6), "then" (iii. 7), "but" (iv. 1), &c. Intercourse with northern nations had not debased his language. "An undertone of deep earnestness pervades the book; everywhere are discerned the workings of an intensely honourable and patriotic soul. Micah is successful in the use of the dialogue, and his prophecies are penetrated by the purest spirit of morality and piety." "His prophecy sank so deep, that above a century afterwards, just when it was about to have its fulfilment, it was *the* prophecy which was remembered. But the sufferings of time disappeared in the light of eternal truth. Above seven centuries rolled by, and Micah reappears as the herald, not of sorrow, but of salvation. Wise men from afar, in the nobility of their simple belief, asked, '*Where is he that is born King of the Jews?*' The answer was given unhesitatingly, as a well-known truth of God, in the words of Micah. When he was born, he was pointed out as the object of worship to the first converts from the heathen through Micah" [*Pusey*].

CHAPTER I.

Critical Notes. **2. Hear**] Lit. Hear, ye peoples all of them. "Some 140 or 150 years had flowed by since Micaiah, son of Imlah, had closed his prophecy in these words. Now they burst out anew. From age to age the Word of God holds its course, ever receiving new fulfilments, never dying out, until the end shall come" [*Pusey*]. **All therein**] Heb. the fulness thereof (Ps. xxiv. 1). Similar appeals in Isa. i. 2, and Deut. xxxii. 1. **Witness**] in a hostile sense, in judgment, as 1 Sam. xii. 5: Mal. iii. 5. **Temple**] *i. e.* from heaven where he is enthroned (Ps. xi. 4), and from whence wrath is revealed (Rom. i. 18). **3. Tread** upon the proud and idolatrous (high places) people, as Ruler over all the earth. **4.**] Imagery from storms and earthquakes, to describe the terrors of God's judgments (Ps. xviii. 8). The similes, "like wax" (as in Ps. lxviii. 3), and "like water," are intended to express the complete dissolution of mountains and valleys. "The actual facts answering to this description are the destructive influences exerted upon nature by great national judgments" [*Keil*]. **5. Trans.**] as the cause of this judgment. Samaria and Jerusalem, the capitals of Israel and Judah, are the centres and source of corruption which has filled the kingdoms. **6. Heap**] Samaria, judged first, will be destroyed—not a trace of the city will be left—and become like a heap of stones gathered from the field. **Pour**] Dash down the stones of the city into the valley beneath. "The stones of the temples and palaces of Samaria have been carefully removed from the rich soil, thrown together in heaps, built up in the rude walls of terraces, and rolled down into the valley below" [*Porter's Handbook*]. **7.**] Her treasures were gathered from the hire of a harlot, and to the hire of a harlot must they return. Literal prostitution was practised in Babylon and Syria, and the *hire* was dedicated to the support of the priesthood, and idolatrous worship. **8.**] The Prophet first laments himself, that he may touch others. **Stripped**] *i. e.* of shoes or sandals. **Naked**] *i. e.* without upper garment (1 Sam. xix. 24). This representation accords with Isa. xx. 2, and symbolizes what would befall the people. **Dragons**] Jackals or wolves (Job xxx. 29), whose howlings are at night most lamentable. **Ostrich**] Remarkable for its peculiar shrieks in pain. **9. Wounds**] Lit. the strokes inflicted upon her. Public calamities are often compared to diseases (Isa. i. 5). **Gate**] "Because in it, *par excellence*, the people went out and in." Even the capital would not be spared. **10.**] The Prophet thinks now of the malicious joy of heathen neighbours. Ten places are mentioned in verses 10—15 to depict what would happen in them. In most cases the things said of each city are a play upon the name of that city, a method of writing well adapted to impress the memory [*Cowles*]. **11. Forth**] To console others (Jer. vi. 25). **Standing**] *i. e.* the sustenance of the foe. **12. Waited**] for better fortune, but in vain [*Calvin*]. **13. Bind**] Flee as fast as possible from the advancing enemy. **Begin.**] The first to introduce false gods. **14. Thou**] Israel would renounce all claim to *Mor.* and give it up to the foe; and *Ach.* would answer to its name, and disappoint Israel's hopes. **15. Heir**] A new possessor, viz., the Assyrian shall occupy the place, as they expelled former inhabitants, and Israel's glory (*Adullam*) shall decay. **16. Bald**] A token of deep mourning (Job i. 20: Isa. xv. 2: Jer. xvi. 6). **Children**] wept for, as the loss of a mother. **Eagle**] Not the common eagle, but the bearded or carrion vulture. Judgments in general are described, not particular definite punishments, without precise methods of accomplishment, so that the predictions embrace all the judgments against Judah which took place from the Assyrian invasion until the Roman catastrophe [*Keil*].

HOMILETICS.

The Prophetic Message.—*Verses* 1, 2.

"The Prophet's first address is throughout of a threatening and punitive character; it is not till quite the close, that the sun of Divine grace breaks brightly through the thunder-clouds of judgment" [*Keil*]. In these words we have an appeal to all nations to observe the message of the Prophet.

I. **A message from God.** "The word of the Lord." All prophets have the same truth to assert. Their message is Divine and not from "the will of man." It declares the purpose, reveals the mercy and the judgment of God. It is seen in prophetic vision, felt and known to be certain and true. It bears witness to God in the hearts of men and in the nations of the earth. II **A message from God through man.** "That came to Micah." The Prophet and no other man of his day was specially chosen to declare the word of the Lord. He was qualified by vision and spiritual intercourse with God. There is a *human* as well as a Divine

element in the spoken or written word. God acts not *on*, but *in* and *through*, man. Vital energy was not lost in a passive state, and growth reduced to mere existence. The prophets spoke not by mechanical impulse or dictation. Their natural and spiritual gifts were not set aside. They had sympathy with truth and men. Their intellect and heart were fixed on the same pursuit, and God's word found them in a waiting position. **III. A message from God through man for all people.** For the people of the present and the future generations. 1. *The present.* Samaria and Jerusalem were immediately concerned, the chief cities of the two kingdoms. Judgment first begins at the house of God. *Jerusalem*, God's people, must not be spared. But other people are often prominent in sin and punishment. *Samaria* is put first as chief in provocation. God deals in equity with men and chastises according to desert. Some are threatened and comforted; others judged without mercy. We expect equity in our intercourse with each other. Shall not the Judge of the earth do right, mete justice to each individually and to all men in everything? At last all ranks will be adjusted, and to every one will be given his due. 2. *The future.* "Hear, all ye people." God warns the future through the present generations. Angels and men, heaven and earth, are cited to witness the solemn scene. The whole creation stands in court, to reprove the sins of men, and testify to the justice of Divine pleading. The guilty cannot escape. The "holy temple" will not protect the hypocrite, as tutelar deities were thought to protect the heathen. The majesty of God from heaven will overawe and silence the sinner. God will purge his floor, and discern between his nominal and real people. "He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. *The Word.* Micaiah son of Imlah closed his prophecy with these words (1 Kings xxii. 28). The ministrations of one prophet are a continuation of his predecessors. They are not parts or parcels, but connected with Divine revelation in every age, and fill up one grand design. Hence learn, 1. The *benevolence* of the Word. 2. The *adaptation* of the Word. 3. The *perpetuity* of the Word.

Hear, all people. The judgment of Israel. 1. A *warning* to all people. 2. A *type* of final judgment. God by the fulfilment of this word is a "witness" to the guilt of sin and the equity of his conduct. He warns before the stroke. Seek to be saved, and rest not in holy places and carnal security.

Hearken, O earth. 1. The trial of the Great Judge. 2. The parties accused. 3. The witnesses called. 4. The seat of the Judge—The Judgment of the visible Church. It is Divine, public, searching, solemn, and righteous.

Holy temple. The elevation, supremacy, and invisibility of God's throne [*Spurgeon*]. "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men."

HOMILETICS.

The Awful Judgment.—*Verses* 3—7.

To quicken attention to his message, the Prophet declares God's purpose to humble the most eminent and manifest his justice to all.

I. The seat of judgment. "The Lord cometh forth out of his place." If the place means either the temple or heaven itself, the procedure is not ordinary. God quits the temple, and turns the mercy-seat into a throne of judgment. He has not retired from the government of the world, but rends the heavens and comes down in awful justice to sinful nations. His daily providence affords no rule to guide us when he "comes out of his place." He manifests himself in surprising wrath (Isa. xxvi. 21), and performs "terrible things which we looked not for." **II. The circumstances of judgment.** "The mountains shall be molten under

him," &c. This may be figurative language, but it conveys a real truth. Nature trembles, and its stability dissolves at God's presence. The hills melt like wax before the fire, the mountains pour down like floods into the valley. The earth in its lowest depths feels the indignation of a righteous God. Nature often realizes the destructive power of Divine judgments. History proves that all her forces are yoked to accomplish God's purposes. The hardest will melt, the strongest cannot resist; "for, behold, the Lord will come with fire, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." **III. The cause of judgment.** "For the transgressions of Jacob, is all this." *Jerusalem*, the centre of holiness, and the residence of Jehovah, was the seat of idols, and the fountain of uncleanness (2 Chron. xxviii. 24). The unity, the claims, and the being of God were denied in the worship of Baal (Ezek. xvi. 31 : 2 Chron. xxviii. 24, 25). *Samaria*, the rival capital, was the seat of injustice, and the corrupter of the country. The sins of these places were obstinate and aggravating. Sin is the cause of all ruin, material and moral. Multiplied sins (*transgressions*) will bring severe strokes. External rites and outward profession will not secure "the house of Israel." Wealth and population cannot defend Samaria. All have provoked God to anger, and must feel his severity. Those who take no warning and feel no shame, ought to learn that shame and warning are a desert and a presage to ruin. "They are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah." **IV. The effects of judgment.** "The order of the sin was the order of the punishment," says one. 1. *High places would be overturned.* God will "tread upon the high places of the earth." Men of eminence, scenes of idolatry, and military fortifications; everything set in opposition to him would be trampled down and levelled in the dust. The lofty and the proud, the mighty and the secure, will be cast down. Those who trust in the height of the mountain or in the fertility of the valley, the munitions of rocks or the abundance of wealth, will be disappointed. There is no security against Divine judgment but in Christ Jesus. 2. *Idolatry would be demolished.* The *idols* themselves would be stripped by the foe and destroyed. All graven images would be beaten to pieces. Gross superstitions and refined idolatry are spiritual adultery, and provoke God to jealousy. The *hire* and support of idolatry would be taken away. Micah adopts the language of Hosea (Hosea ii. 5—8; ix. 1, x. 6). The wealth or rewards received for worshipping idols, the gifts and votive offerings laid upon the altars, would enrich another nation. They had been gathered as the hire of a harlot, "and they shall return to the hire of a harlot." Riches gained without God will be scattered away. Cursed in their origin, cursed in their end. "Ill got, ill spent." "Whatever material prosperity is gained by ignoring or dethroning God is the hire, the price of the soul, and shall be burned out with fire." Men shall be put to shame that abuse their gifts, and their sinful gain shall turn to everlasting loss. 3. *The city would be destroyed.* Samaria, the crown of pride (Isa. xxviii. 1), was to be reduced to its original meanness, the site of vine-plantings. Its gorgeous palaces and noble temples would be destroyed. The stones would be rolled down the hills, and gathered into heaps as monuments of ruin. The foundations would be laid bare, and not one stone left upon another. The destruction would be complete; fragments of human habitations, emblems of man's labour and luxury, should lie amid the beauty and fertility of nature. Traces of sin and punishment are written in commercial ruin, national disgrace, and natural scenery. Whatever we build without God, church systems or family fortunes, and cement by strongest sins, will be hurled down with the storm; great will be their fall and eternal their ruins. "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."

THE INCURABLE WOUND.—*Verses* 8, 9.

The strokes inflicted by God are most severe. The wound is incurable. Morally

and politically individually and generally, the case is desperate. Hence the Prophet is moved to bitter sorrow.

I. **The moral disease of men is incurable.** Obstinacy in sin will bring Divine judgments, and no hand can cure the wounds that God inflicts but his own. 1. *It is a deadly disease.* "Her wound is incurable," lit. she is grievously sick of her wounds. The centre, the vital parts of the kingdom, are tainted, the capital is corrupted. 2. *It is a universal disease.* The calamity begins with Samaria and comes to Jerusalem, the seat of justice and of religion. 3. *It is a hopeless disease.* The Prophet saw no remedy in the present state of things. This is a sad picture of the condition of the sinner. He is not simply in distress, but morally diseased and morally incurable. "There are anodynes that may deaden their pains, and death will relieve them of their torture," says a writer; "but a morally incurable soul is destined to pass into anguish, intense and more intense as existence runs on, and peradventure without end." "Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous." **II. This morally incurable wound should create intense sorrow.** The Prophet vents his grief in all ways of expressing grief. He goes stripped, "half-naked," as we say, without garments of beauty, despoiled, plundered by an enemy. He *wails* like the pitiable cry of a jackal in the night, or an ostrich bereaved of her young. He *mourns* with increasing feeling for the chastisement, and as an example to his people. We should lament not only the sufferings of saints but the punishments of sinners. Ministers themselves must be affected with the message they deliver to others. To win souls they must be men of sympathy. The impending ruin of the ungodly must move them to tears before God. "I will grieve from the heart over those who perish," said one. "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?" "Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed?"

THE PROPHET'S LAMENTATION.—*Verse* 10.

The calamity of God's people and the sorrow of the Prophet were such that should be unknown to the enemy, lest he should indulge in malignant joy, and add to affliction. Hence, in language borrowed from 2 Sam. i. 20, they are urged to conceal distress, suppress weeping, lest the Philistines in Gath should hear.

Learn, **I. That some rejoice in the affliction of God's people.** "Declare it not," &c. Many would be glad to see the Church in deepest misery. Strange to say that nearest neighbours are often bitterest enemies. *Gath* was next to the borders, but did not partake of the spirit of Judah. But God's servants have great sympathy with his people, and constant jealousy for his honour. "Let none that wait on thee be ashamed." **II. That God's people cannot always hide their affliction.** "Weep not," it will be of no avail. Sometimes grief may be smothered by concealing it. At other times it is impossible to hide it. God will publish it as a discipline to his people and a warning to the world. Our afflictions must be noted by men, and under them they may be permitted to insult and reproach us. But God will defend his honour and his church. "Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants" (Cf. Ps. lxxxix. 50: 1 Pet. ii. 20). **III. That God's people should humble themselves under their affliction.** "Roll thyself in the dust.' It not to mourn in Gath, they may in Aphrah. Silent before the wicked, they may grieve in private. Noisy lamentation may be imprudent, but silent tears are becoming. When weeping would be the joy and laughter of God's enemies it is often acceptable to God. From the *dust* we sprang, to the dust we must return, and affliction is designed to remind us of this. "O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation."

GREAT CITIES AND GREAT RUIN.—*Verses* 11—16.

Whether the following places be figurative or real, they set forth the greatness of the calamity which falls upon them by their names, qualities, and condition.

I. Great cities are often guilty of great sins. Proximity and commercial intercourse corrupt. Popular sins spring from certain ranks and certain places. Each has its special sin, and all are involved in idolatry and its miseries. **II. In the punishment of great cities God deals to each its due.** Each city of Judah received its due. *Saphir* with its beauty would be clothed with shame; *Zaanan* with its flocks and population would be the encampment of the enemy, and unable to sympathize with *Beth-ezel*, its nearest neighbour. The inhabitants of *Maroth* would expect good and receive evil; *Lachish* would be strong only to flee, "like a brook that fails and deceives; her *inheritance* (Mareshah) inherited; herself taking refuge in dens and caves of the earth, yet even there found and bereft of her glory." God weighs truly the responsibilities of each, and foremost in privileges will be foremost in punishment for the neglect of those privileges. **III. No earthly power can ward off the punishment of great cities.** It may be lawful to defend ourselves in danger; but against God's fierce anger none can prevail. 1. *Human helps will be in vain.* Maroth waited anxiously for good, but were disappointed (ver. 12). Beauty and strength, splendid positions and large populations, will not succour those who trust to them. Men who hope in sin will find bitterness in the end; and this bitterness may only be the beginning of a greater calamity. "Unto the gate of Jerusalem." 2. *Flight cannot save* (ver. 13). Lachish had chariots and swift beasts, but where are they now? Shut up in the hand of the enemy, and unable to escape. "The horse is prepared against the day of battle, but safety is of the Lord." 3. *Presents cannot bribe.* Lachish would send gifts to some town or country in Gath to purchase aid against the invader, but would be disappointed. Wicked men employ any means rather than seek God in trouble. They might learn from those whose sins are written on their foreheads, and whose name and nature are a lie. "The houses of Achzib shall be a lie to the king of Israel." 4. *Great distance will not secure.* Adullam was the remotest border to Assyria (ver. 15). Distance, if such there be, can never exempt from God's judgments. He will find out and chastise the guilty wherever they be. Christ is the only security, and heaven the only abiding inheritance. Secure those blessings from which no enemy can drive you. **IV. Universal mourning results from the ruin of great cities.** The body of the people, the mother cities, are called upon to mourn. The people will be taken captive and diminished, or if left behind will be weakened and despised. Sin in the end will turn mirth into bitterness, deprive of liberty, plunge into misery and everlasting lamentation. "And in that day did the Lord God of Hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth."

The Inhabitant of Maroth.—*Verse* 12.

This refers to the invasion of the Assyrian, the rod of God's anger. He had subdued and ravaged Israel, and now entered Judah. The Prophet laments the horrors of the scene, and describes the effects of them upon the places in the line of march. Maroth was very interior, and situated nigh Jerusalem; and probably the inhabitants thought on that account they were safer than those who lived on the borders. This may remind us of the disappointments of life, the source of calamity, and the season of deliverance. They "waited carefully for good;" but in vain: "evil came." Is such a *disappointment* a strange or unusual thing? What is there in life that is not uncertain, and does not expose the hope resting upon it? Is it Substance? Health? Children? Friends? Does the Scripture only cry, "All is vanity;" and, "Cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils"? Does not all history, observation, and experience tell us the same? Let the young, and all, be sober in expectation of earthly things. It is the way to escape the *surprise* and *anguish* of disappointment. Make the Lord your *hope*. He will not deceive us: he cannot fail us. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." See also *the source* of

calamity. "Evil came down from the Lord." This seems strange when we are assured that "every good and every perfect gift" comes down from him. Micah speaks of natural evil, or the evil of suffering. And what calamity is there that Scripture has not ascribed to God? A storm at sea? "He breaketh the ships of Tarshish." Barrenness of soil? "He turneth a fruitful land into barrenness." The loss of connections? "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me." We oftener connect war with the follies and passions of men than other evils; but he has "created the waster to destroy." Never view sufferings, public or private, personal or relative, abstractedly from God. Let not the instruments lead us to overlook his agency. They could have no power at all against us except it was given them from above. But how does this evil come from him? Some view mercy as separate from justice; and others justice as separate from mercy: one of these partial views genders presumption, the other despair. Extremes should be avoided in considering God as the righteous governor and the tender father. Everything in his present administration is adapted to show the union of holiness and goodness, to awaken fear and hope. The evils he sends are the *effects* of sin; the *fruits* to take away sin. We *deserve* them and *need* them; the one shows that we have no *right* to murmur, the other that we have no *reason* to complain. Cheerful submission is required; but this can only be given when we see the relation that affliction has to our desert and improvement. Mark also *the time* of deliverance. Though God saves his people he may permit destruction to draw very nigh. In this case he could have hindered the calamity at the frontier, but evil came "unto the gate of Jerusalem." So far, but no farther, did the insulting foe come. Here were his proud waves stayed. Here his power and triumph ended. Hezekiah conquered him on his knees, and the Lord put his bridle into his jaws and drew him back. The angel made a great slaughter in the camp that night, showing that God can not only deliver in the greatest straits, but that he frequently does not interfere till the evil has reached its extremity. The delay is not abandonment. He waits to be gracious, and the season in which he will appear will display his glory and draw forth our praise. It is often darkest just before the break of day. "*In the mount it shall be seen*" [*Jay*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 10. To be indifferent to the honour of God, and to have no sorrow at reproach being brought on the cause of religion through the fall of its professors, is the mark of the carnal, unregenerate mind [*Fausset*].

Ver. 11. Selfish men are often so taken up with their own sorrows that they have no sympathy for others. "*The inhabitant of Zaanan came not forth in the mourning of Beth-ezel.*"

Ver. 13. *Beginning of sin.* What a world of evil lies in the three words! [*Pusey*]. To be the first occasion and chief stumbling-block in a land's defection brings on exemplary judgment [*Hutcheson*].

Ver. 14. Learn—I. That in trouble men often flee to human help. Treaties, presents, and bribes are all tried rather than God. II. That God warns men against trusting to human help. 1. By their own experience. 2. By the experience of others. "The houses of Achzib" might have taught wisdom, for they are "a lie." III. The failure of all human helps is conspicuous. They are known by their names, natures, and results. They deceive, they are "*a lie.*"

Ver. 15. All possessions, houses, lands, and families are insecure when God is provoked—may be taken from us, and another may be the heir to them. "*I will bring an heir unto thee.*"

The glory of Israel. 1. Religious privileges are the glory of a nation. 2. This glory may depart through a nation's sin. When religious ordinances are neglected or abused, and God is provoked, they cannot ward off judgment. A nation's glory may then be laid in the dust.

Ver. 16. 1. The signs of sorrow. *Baldness*, enlarged baldness. In other cases baldness forbidden Israel, but in sorrow for sin they were called to it (Isa. xxii. 12). *As the eagle*, which not only loses its feathers, but its beauty, swiftness, and courage with them. 2. The causes of sorrow. The captivity of children. Indulgent fathers may become parricides, not parents. "Those who give themselves up to luxury are at least given up to miserable slavery. When a man makes his children effeminate he makes for himself grief and heart-pangs" [*Lange*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1. *Word.* The Word of God is the bodying forth of his mind, the incarnation of his thought, the vehicle of his will; by which he would bring himself near to us, to woo us and awe us, to attract us by his love or terrify us by his judgments. It is the sum of all that the world knows of him. It is the expression of his character, the history of his procedure [*Legge*].

Ver. 3, 4. *Earth.* Inanimate nature knows its Creator, and worships him in its own fashion. "States and kingdoms which stand out upon the world like mountains are utterly dissolved when he decrees their end. Systems as ancient and firmly-rooted as the hills pass away when he does but look upon them" [*Spurgeon*].

"Macbeth is ripe for shaking, and the powers above
Put on their instruments" [*Shakespeare*].

Ver. 5. *Transgression.* God's justice on offenders goes not always in the same path, nor the same pace; and he is not pardoned for the fault who is for a while reprieved from the punishment [*Fuller*].

Ver. 6—8. *Heap.* Travellers speak of the site of Samaria as strewed with masses of ruins; of its rich soil now cultivated in terraces; and of the stones that are collected together into heaps. The whole face of this part of the hill suggests the idea that the buildings of the ancient city had been thrown down from the brow of the hill. Ascending to the top, we went round the whole summit, and found marks of the same process everywhere [*Narrative of Scottish Mission*].

Ver. 7. *Broken.* Its idols in whom she trusts, so far from protecting her, shall themselves go into captivity, broken up for the gold and silver whereof they were made. The wars of the Assyrians being religious wars, the idolatry of Assyria destroyed the idolatry and idols of Israel [*Pusey*].

Ver. 9. *Incurable.* Moral disorganization can never be remedied by intellectual culture. Social reforms may alter circumstances, but the gospel only can remove the evils of society.

"Pause not; for the present time's so sick
That present medicine must be ministered,
Or overthrow *incurable* ensues" [*Shakespeare*]

Ver. 10—16. God's providences illustrate his word. Nations are punished for their sins. "History is a practical comment upon revelation, and revelation is a sure key to many parts of history."

This passage of Micah (ver. 10—16) is to be compared with that noble one in Isaiah (x. 28—32), where the Prophet describes the panic which spreads from one town to another near Jerusalem, when the Assyrian army under Sennacherib invaded Judah, and took all its fenced cities (xxxvi. 1). Micah continues the prophetic description of Isaiah. Isaiah represents the panic, alarm, and havoc produced in the days of Hezekiah by the Assyrian army under Sennacherib invading Jerusalem from the north-east. Micah represents his career to the south-west, even to Lachish, mentioned by both the prophets (See ver. 13).

We know from Jeremiah (xxvi. 18) that the prophetic warnings and reproofs of Micah wrought powerfully on the mind of the good king Hezekiah; and that for a time the judgments impending over Jerusalem were averted by his repentance. Similar results appear to have been produced on him by the cheering voice of Isaiah, who completed the work of Micah, by inspiring the king

with faith and hope; and God blessed the work of the two prophets, and the prayers of the penitent king, who at first had faltered (See 2 Kings xviii. 14—16), by delivering him and his people, and by destroying the army of Sennacherib, when it returned from Egypt in triumph, beneath the walls of Jerusalem. (See above, on Isa. xxxvii 36.) [*Wordsworth.*]

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Judgment has been pronounced in general, now special sins are described. The conduct of the nobility is denounced. **Devise**] Heb. to form plans (Ps. xxxvi. 5). **Work**] Fabricate, mature the plan (Ps. lviii. 2). **Practise**] To execute (Is. xli. 4). **Beds**] *i. e.* by night (Cf. Ps. iv. 5: Job iv. 13). **Morning**] *i. e.* at break of day. **Hand**] Their hand is their God; right is overruled by might. **2. Covet**] Cf. Ex. xx. 14: Deut. v. 18. **Oppress**] Defraud. **3. Family**] Nation. **Devise**] Cf. ver. 1, "to set clearly before our eyes the *jus talionis* prevalent in God's providence" (Ex. xxi. 23: Is. xxxiii. 1) [*Lange*]. **Necks**] You cannot shake off punishment as ye have done law. **Haughtily**] Stiff necks will have to bend, they will not carry themselves loftily (Ps. lviii. 9), for their iniquity causes an evil time. **4. Par-**] Wickedness and punishment will be subjects of common conversation. **Doleful**] Lit. laments with a lamentation of lamentations, *i. e.* a mournfully mournful song. **Say**] "*Actum est!* it is all over! an exclamation of despair." **Turning**] *i. e.* causes the inheritance to pass to the heathen; some, "to a rebel, our fields he divideth." **5 Cast**] No possession left for the usual mode of division. **6. Prophesy**] Lit. to drip, to cause words to flow, prophesying (Am. vii. 16). "The people, the false prophets, the politicians, forbade God and Micah to prophesy. **Prophesy not**] God, by Micah, recites their prohibition to themselves, and forewarns them of the consequences" [*Pusey*]. **Shame**] Lit. shames, manifold shame (cf. Am. vii. 16). **7. Straitened**] *i. e.* shortened, impatient. **These**] *i. e.* the punishments threatened; a speech which claims for itself the promises regardless of moral condition. God not less merciful than formerly (Ex. xxxiv. 6); but their sins have changed his proceedings towards them. **8. Late**] Lit. yesterday = not long since; or again, recently, the people stood up, took an hostile attitude. **Pull off**] Not content with the outer garment, they rob passers-by of the ornamental robe, strip them of their habiliments as spoils of war. **9. Women**] Widows, unprotected (Is. x. 2), were driven from houses to which they were attached, and which they inherited from their husbands. **Children**] Orphans of widows not spared. **Glory**] My ornament, *i. e.* garment or upper-coat. **For ever**] No repentance, no return of the coat according to law (Ex. xxii. 25—27). **10. Arise**] As you have cast out others, so must you be cast out. Canaan was no longer a *rest* to them. **11. Spirit**] Lit. walk in the wind, sig. what is vain or worthless (Is. xxvi. 18; xli. 29); some, "the man of spirit, *i. e.* claiming inspiration." **Prophesy**] Soothe you in gluttony and drunkenness; *he* would be listened to because he flattered you. **12.**] A sudden transition from judgment to joy. The remnant of Israel after sifting shall be gathered together, multiplied, and governed by Jehovah as their king. **Bozrah**] Rich in pastures and flocks. **13. Breaker**] "A traditional Messianic expression," will break a way for them in every hindrance and enemy. Cyrus delivering from Babylon is an eminent type of Christ redeeming from sin. **Gate**] of the city of captivity. **Before**] them, as in going up out of Egypt (Ex. xiii. 21: Deut. i. 30, 33), to lead the way. "The fulfilment of this prophecy commenced with the gathering together of Israel to its God and King by the preaching of the Gospel, and will be completed at some future time when the Lord shall redeem Israel, which is now pining in dispersion, out of the fetters of its unbelief and life of sin" [*Keil*].

HOMILETICS.

THE CONCEPTION AND PRACTICE OF INJUSTICE.—*Verses* 1, 2.

Special sins are now condemned. The injustice and oppression of the rich are denounced and threatened with punishment.

I. **Injustice in its purpose.** "That devise iniquity." Iniquity is first conceived, purposed, or planned. They plot and forecast before they act it. Actions are traced to principles. *Devising* is the incipient working of the principle. The *thought* is the fountain of the deed. God calls it the *work* of evil, and holds us responsible for it (Prov. xiv. 22: Matt ix. 3, 4). It is bad enough to be

led into wickedness by others, but to devise, to scheme it is the depravity of "inventors of evil things" (Rom. i. 30). **II. Injustice in its maturity.** They "work evil," mature it in thoughts and desires. 1. *It is matured in the night*, "upon their beds." In the rest and stillness of night when they should commune with their own hearts and their God. They turn the chamber of sleep into a place for plotting, and abuse retirement by wicked designs. "He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good." 2. *It is matured in the day.* "When the morning is light." Early, very soon after conception it is perfected. On their bed, and in their waking hours; no leisure between deliberation and practice. It is done (1) *Openly*, in the light. (2) *Deliberately*, in full light. (3) *Shamefully*, against knowledge and conscience. 3. *It is matured by might.* "Because it is in the power of their hand." Might, not right, regulated their conduct. The lust for power increases in strength and lawlessness, until it becomes a law to itself, the master passion of the soul. Then no sacrifices are too costly, no measures too atrocious, for the attainment of its object. "This they begin to do, and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do." **III. Injustice in its practice.** "They practise it." There is a gradation in evil. First they sin in thought, then desire, and afterwards in act. To covet and to rob, to desire and to take, were the same thing with them. 1. *It is a forbidden practice.* They covet, disregard law, and seek to add field to field. 2. *It is a violent practice.* "Take them by violence." Grossly and openly, by force and fraud, did they seize the property of others. 3. *It is an inhuman practice.* "They oppress a man and his house." They took away houses and heritages, and ruined whole families and their offspring. Human life was not held sacred. Like Ahab, they first coveted, then sought to destroy their fellow-men by violence and false accusation. "Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours." 4. *It is a cursed practice.* "Woe to them!" Woe in Hebrew means all kind of pain, sorrow, and misery. Covetousness is the root of all evil to ourselves and others (1 Tim. vi. 9, 10). A covetous man is cursed in this life and in that to come. "Beware of covetousness."

> "You take my house when you do take the prop
> That doth sustain my house; you take my life
> When you do take the means whereby I live" [*Shakespeare*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

The reign of selfishness. 1. Each one strives and plans for himself alone. 2. Each one trusts in his own strength. 3. Each one disregards the law [*Lange* (adapted)]. What a temptation it is to have the power to do what evil spite suggests! What would many a one do if the power of the hand were as great as the boldness of the heart! As it is, however, God judges according to the counsel of the heart, and brings to light what a man has been occupied with even on his bed [*Ibid.*]. 1. Notice the *gradation* of the evil. Conception, earnest preparation, and execution by force. "They say, they coveted, they took," like Achan. 2. The relation between wicked *thoughts* and wicked *deeds*. The oppressor in his bed, in his heart, and in his life. Resist the first attacks of sin lest ye be eventually overcome.

HOMILETICS

RETRIBUTIVE PUNISHMENT.—*Verses* 3—5.

Sentence is now pronounced against the sins specified, and the *woe* threatened (ver. 1) is explained. God will inflict such judgments, and bring such times, that will effectually humble their pride and recompense their wickedness.

I. Punishment in kind. God is not an idle spectator of oppression, and delay

in punishment is not disregard. 1. *They devised evil* against others, and evil is devised against them. "Against this family do I devise an evil." Retribution is measured and planned against wicked men. Infinite wisdom will frustrate and punish human designs. 2. They *took the lands* of others, and their own land shall be taken from them. The inheritance was given to the foe and would never be divided by lot again. Mercies given by special providence may be removed in righteous judgment for our sin. If we forsake God he will forsake us. Riches, honour, and pleasure he can turn into captivity, and unjust gain will pass into the hands of others. Words are not sown in the wind, and actions written in the dust; but like imperishable seed they spring up and fructify in human life. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." **II. Punishment most humiliating.** 1. *They would be humbled in their pride.* "Neither shall ye go haughtily." Men dream that if they cannot avoid judgments they will be undaunted and courageous under them. God can humble the proud, subdue the self-willed, and throw the mightiest into captivity and sorrow. 2. *They would become a by-word in their sufferings.* "In that day shall one take up a parable against you." The calamity was not an ordinary one, but a common proverb in the mouth of others. Sinners are often an example of God's justice and a warning to others. When others insult and jest at our grief it is most bitter to endure. The most haughty and prosperous will then be dejected and sad. 3. *Their condition would be most lamentable.* "Lament with a doleful lamentation." (*a*) Because *the change was so great.* God had taken their possessions and fixed others in them. "He hath changed the portion of my people." (*b*) Because *their case was so hopeless.* "We be utterly spoiled." What reverses in life to prove the folly of men and the providence of God. "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented." **III. Punishment most irretrievable.** "An evil from which ye shall not remove your necks." It was a yoke they could neither avoid nor shake off. From the two tribes the yoke was removed, but the ten were never able to withdraw their necks. The punishment was most severe and proportioned in justice to the sins. Those that will not be ruled by grace will be overcome by judgment. Prefer the easy to the iron yoke. Flee now from sin that you may be saved from judgment at last. "For *this* time is evil."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 4. The dirge which follows is purposely in abrupt brief words, as those in trouble speak, with scarce a breath for utterance. *First*, in two words, with perhaps a softened inflection, they express the utterness of their desolation. *Then*, in a threefold sentence, each close consisting of three short words, they say what God has done, but name him not because they are angry with him. God's chastisements irritate those whom they do not subdue (Amos vi. 10) [*Pusey*].

Spoiled. Joel spoke of the parting of their land, under this same term, as a sin of the heathen (iii. 2). Now they say God *divideth our fields*, not to us, but to the heathen, whose lands he gave us. It *was* a change of act; in impenitence they think it a change of purpose or will. But what lies in that *we be utterly despoiled?* Despoiled of everything; of what they felt, temporal things; and of what they did not feel, spiritual things. Despoiled of the land of promise, the *good things* of this life, but also of the presence of God in his temple, the grace of the Lord, the image of God and everlasting glory [*Pusey*].

Blessings abused are at last removed by the Almighty Giver.

None by lot. Wickedness casting out a people, 1. From the protection and blessings of God; 2. Will cast out from the presence of God hereafter. Neither part nor lot in this matter (Acts viii. 21).

HOMILETICS.

OPPOSITION TO GOD'S WORD AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.—*Verses* 6, 7.

A second accusation is brought against them, for contempt of God's Word and opposition to his servants. The wicked could not endure the threatening of judgment, sought to silence the Prophet (Amos vii. 10—12), or make him preach to please only, as their false prophets did. This conduct adds to their sins, leaves them without true teachers, and throws them into deeper shame.

I. **Man's opposition to God's Word.** "Prophesy ye not, say they to them that prophesy." Opposition to God's Word is an insult to his character, and a denial of his authority. 1. Men are offended with *the faithful preaching* of the Word. The truth is unwelcome to those who live in sin. Judgment terrifies them and conscience accuses them in guilt. The cross is an offence, and the gospel a stumbling-block to many. They want the preacher to please them, withhold the truth, and speak peace when there is no peace. "Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits." 2. Men are offended with *the constant preaching* of the Word. "Drop not," distil not; indicating habitual and unceasing warning and lamentation. Occasional appeals may be overlooked; but to be constantly threatened is disagreeable and offensive. It is vinegar and nitre dropped in the conscience instead of dew and refreshment to the heart. It argues an ungodly life and a degenerate age to resist the warnings of the gospel. "Did we not straitly command you, that ye should not teach in this name?" **II. God's purpose to fulfil His Word.** When the wicked said *prophesy not*, the Lord answered, *they shall prophesy*. The Word must be published. Men must be warned whether they hear or forbear. 1. *God's servants must obey their commission.* Persecuted and opposed, they must be faithful to their trust and to their God. "Of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears" (Jer. xxvi. 10—15). 2. *God's Spirit cannot be restrained.* "Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?" Can you overcome God by opposing his servants? Can you restrain the Spirit from uttering the truth, or resolve its purpose to what *you* please? Can you quench the sun or imprison the light? Then you may limit the Holy Spirit in its operations. If God thunders in judgment, it is not because he cannot give mercy. His power is not diminished, and his mercy is from everlasting to everlasting (Cf. Isa. l. 2: Ps. ciii. 17). But sins and iniquities hide his face from you, hinder his word, and procure your punishment. **III. The awful consequences of opposing God's Word.** God takes them at their word. They shall not prophesy, and their shame shall not be removed. 1. *This will deprive them of the faithful ministry.* If men silence God's ministers and hinder God's word, God will leave them without light and reproof. They will have their wish and be righteously punished for their choice. Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone. 2. *This will offend the Spirit of God.* In silencing the prophets they did what they could to silence and limit the Spirit. "Is the Lord's Spirit straitened?" But impenitence cannot shut out conviction from the heart. Human sinfulness cannot frustrate Divine purposes. 3. *This will rob them of religious privileges.* "Thou art named the house of Jacob," but this conduct is most unreasonable for such dignity. Men study to keep up a name, but it is only a name, without anything to answer to it in life. God discerns between show and substance, fair titles and truth. Men may boast of descent, rely on false security, and flatter themselves that they are Abraham's children; but God will reject them, call them a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity. Their privileges will be taken away, and their profession will bring a curse and not a blessing. "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

THE ADVANTAGES OF REVELATION.—*Verse* 7.

The Word of God must operate according to the principles and dispositions

within us. If it be food, it is nothing to the dead, but to the living only. The benefit is only to them that walk by it. We are not to expect that his words will do us good *mechanically*, that is, without our consciousness or activity; or that they will act in us as physical causes operate in the body, where the concoction of the food and the circulation of the fluids go on when we are asleep as well as when we are awake, being independent of our volitions and thoughts. The Scriptures can only affect us *morally*, in a way of motive, in the exercises of the mind, and in the use of the means which God has appointed. This is the only way in which we are *authorized* to look for it to work We must read, hear, and understand them; we must pray over them, speak of them, and reflect upon them. It is endless to describe the benefit they will then do for us. They will do us good in a *way of information*. For the soul to be without knowledge it is not good. There is no knowledge like that of the Scriptures. It is clear, full, and blessed. It gives life to them that have it. It is an advantage in duty and perplexity to hear the voice: This is the way, walk ye in it. They will do us good in a *way of excitement*. We get dull and formal, have a name to live, but are dead. God quickens us according to his Word, endears it to us, and enables us to remember it. "I will never forget thy precepts; for with them thou hast quickened me." They will do us good in a *way of rebuke*. *They* never flatter, but deal truly with us, and frequently reprove us. If we are concerned for our welfare we shall not esteem them our enemy because they tell us the truth. It is improper to limit the benefit of the Word to *encouragement*, to suppose that we have never a *good* opportunity, unless it comforts us. It is a blessing to be humbled and emptied of self, to see our vileness, and cry "God be merciful to me a sinner." We talk of benefactors! What good has the Bible done! What millions has it blessed! How much do we owe it! Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift [*Jay*].

GOD'S APPEAL TO EXPERIENCE.—*Verse* 7.

God's Word does good and not harm. It is folly, therefore, to oppose it. You are then acting not merely in opposition to God, but against your own benefit and the best interests of your country.

I. The words of God design to do good. Words express mind. God's Word reveals God's will and design, and this design is merciful. There are mysteries, but no proofs of malevolent feelings, in the world. Benevolence predominates in *nature*, notwithstanding sin. *Providence* wears a benign aspect. The sun shines and the rain falls on the just and the unjust. But in the *gospel* we have the purpose of God to save, the words of God to bless. "God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." **II. The words of God have done good in human experience.** Their truth has been confirmed within us. The greatest sinners have received good. Saul of Tarsus, Bunyan, and Newton have been forgiven and saved. We can point to trophies of its power in characters most sinful and profligate. "Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified," &c. **III. But the good which the words of God effect depends upon our moral condition.** To him that walketh uprightly. They operate not on outward but moral nature, and influence us according to our relation to them. The sun that melts the wax will harden the clay. Good must be within us before good can come to us. An evil disposition will bring a curse and not a blessing. "To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 6. The words are very emphatic in Hebrew, from their briefness: *Prophesy not; they shall indeed prophesy; they shall not prophesy to these; shame shall not depart* [*Pusey*]. I. Opposition to God. 1. In his servants. 2. In his Word. II. Consequences of opposition. 1. Shame shall rest upon them. 2. The

Word shall be proclaimed to others. "God would have turned away the shame from them; but they, despising his warnings, drew it to themselves. It was the natural fruit of their doings; it was in its natural home with them. The sinner hath but to remain as he is; the shame encompasseth him already, and only *departeth* not. The *wrath of God* is already upon him and abideth on him [*Pusey*].

Ver. 7. *Named.* The name is belied, 1. By conduct which contradicts profession. 2. By claiming the promises of God regardless of moral condition before God. *Jacob* was not copied in spirit and example by those who boasted of his name, a name which reminded of favours, which they abused, and of which they were deprived.

Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? No, for that would—1. Contradict his Word. 2. Be at variance with the facts of human experience. It is free and unfettered, gracious and abundant in its operations (Cf. Mal. ii. 15: 2 Tim. ii. 9: 2 Thess. ii. 9). "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you."

My words. 1. The benevolent nature of God's words, "do *good*." 2. The power of God's words, "*do* good." 3. The persons who enjoy the benefits, "the upright." Those who return to the way of righteousness and do not forsake it (Prov. iv. 26, 27).

That is the old and still practised way of avoiding God's threatenings, namely, that men so readily form conceptions of God, and imagine that he cannot be angry because he is merciful. Let one learn, first of all, to understand God from his own sayings. He who hates the light may for a while resort to imaginary comfort, but it cannot help him [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

Grievous Sins and Righteous Retribution.—*Verses* 8—10.

The Prophet describes the sad change that had come over the people. Their fathers were famous in war, heroic in the defence of their country against the enemy, and humane towards others. But they had barbarously treated peaceful subjects and innocent women and children. God threatens to do to them as they had done to others.

I. What are the sins denounced? 1. *Rebellion against God.* "My people is risen up as an enemy." (*a*) This rebellion was *recent.* "Even of late;" only yesterday you have added to former sins. When men cast off the restraints of God's Word and God's Spirit they will commit greater folly. No bonds will check the ungodly and rebellious. (*b*) This rebellion was *unprovoked.* God was not their enemy, but designed their good. They had *risen up vehemently* (Cf. Micah v. 4; vii. 14: 1 Kings xi. 14) against God and man, and become Ishmaelites rather than Israelites. (*c*) This rebellion was *universal.* They rose up as one man. Whatever their profession, they were one in their sympathies and conduct. Sin is determined opposition to God. Those who assume this attitude are enemies to God and their country, put themselves away from the benefits of God's Word, and prefer darkness to light because their deeds are evil. 2 *Hostility to man.* Casting off the fear of God, they had no regard for man. (*a*) They *robbed peaceful travellers.* Men averse from war and strife were hindered in their journey, stripped of their comely dress, and violently treated as prisoners of war. What injustice to permit this! What inhumanity to man! "Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked; out of the hand of the unrighteous and *cruel* man." (*b*) *They abused defenceless women.* "The women of my people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses." God, the preserver of men, has tender regard for the weaker sex, and will punish aggravations against them. "They devoured widows' houses." (*c*) *They maltreated innocent children.*

They robbed them of the fitting apparel which God had given them, kept the garments *for ever* which they had taken, and never made restitution. They sold into captivity, and never ceased their oppression. Sex did not save the women, nor age the children. Human rights and human happiness were disregarded. Thus they provoked God, who is a husband to the widow and a father to the fatherless. **II. What is the punishment threatened?** 1. *They were treated as enemies.* They had set upon quiet citizens as if they were suspicious characters; ill used friends as if they had been enemies. God now considers *them* as enemies. "My people is risen up as an enemy." 2. *They were deprived of their possessions.* As they had driven helpless widows from their homes, so God gives them corresponding punishment. The land shall not be their rest; they must quit it by force, for it is polluted by their sin. "Arise ye and depart." There can be no resting-place in sin. A place polluted by guilt will soon become "the sore destruction" of its inhabitants. "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword."

THE CHRISTIAN'S CALL FROM EARTH.—*Verse* 10.

We may take these words as a call to Christians to arise from the world with all its attractions—an admonition not to live too much for earth. For everything proclaims the transitory nature of things below, and reminds us that "here we have no continuing city." Every condition justifies the sentiment of the poet—

"Too low they build who build beneath the skies."

I. Earth is not the scene of repose. "This is not your rest." We get no repose *physically.* Outward circumstances, however smooth, get upset and changed. *Intellectually* we get no satisfaction. The more we know, the more we desire to know. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the intellect with knowing. But *spiritually* rest is impossible on earth. Earth is an inn, not a home; our passage, not our portion. Only at the end of our journey will be "quietness and assurance for ever." **II. Earth is not the place of destination.** Many idolize the world, and live as if they had not to depart hence; but the Christian is a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth. "I am a citizen of the whole world," said Diogenes, when asked what countryman he was. Our citizenship is in heaven, and, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we look "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God," "a better country, even a heavenly." **III. Earth is not suitable for our residence.** "It is good for pilgrimage, but miserable for residence," says one. With all its beauties and pleasures it is *polluted.* Sin and death abound and blacken its fair skies. Sin defiles the land in which it is committed. "Corruption in the world through lust." If you do not keep yourselves unspotted from the world, but settle down in it and make it your rest, you will be overturned "with a sore destruction."

"It is not for me to be seeking my bliss,
Or building my hopes in a region like this;
I look for a city that hands have not piled,
I pant for a country by sin undefiled."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

I. *The description of the world.* 1. It is *polluted.* 2. It is *dangerous.* "It shall destroy you." 3. Hence it is not *a rest.* II. *The command to depart from it.* "Arise," &c. 1. It is *comprehensive.* Separate yourselves from the world, and touch not the unclean. Avoid its *company.* "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." Renounce its *maxims* and *conversations.* "Those who are bound for Canaan must not speak the language of Ashdod," says Philip Henry. Live above the allurements and pleasures, the

anxieties and cares of the world. Set your affections on things above. 2. It is *urgent*. "Arise and *depart*." Like Israel from Egypt, and the pilgrim from the city of destruction, we must hasten and delay not. 3. It is *needed*. We are apt to grow careless, settle down and say, "In my prosperity I shall never be moved," but God wakens us by his providence and Word, "Arise, and depart."

The present is not our rest. It was not *designed* to be our rest. It is not *fit* to be our rest. If we are Christians we have *relinquished* it and chosen another rest. But many, like Reuben and Gad, prefer an inheritance on this side Jordan. The godly themselves have need to have their pure minds stirred up by way of remembrance. God sends them therefore the message, "Arise ye," &c. There are five ways by which he sends it. The first is his *Word*. The second is *affliction*. The third is *worldly success*. The fourth is the earnests and *foretastes* of a *better world*. The last is *death*. This orders us to depart really as well as morally. Every apprehension and approach of it cries, "It is high time to awake out of sleep," &c. [From *Jay*]

HOMILETICS.

The Ministry of False Teachers.—*Verse* 11.

Predictions of judgment were unwelcome to corrupt men. They opposed the true, but would listen to false prophets who flattered them in sin and declared lies. The ministry of such is here described.

I. It is lying in its nature. Falsehood and lies. It misrepresents God and his Word, the gospel and its claims. It is not purity, light, and power, but false and misleading. It ignores or sacrifices truth, and springs not from the Spirit of God, but the spirit of man. They pretend inspiration, but walk in delusion and believe a lie. "Woe unto the foolish prophets that follow their own spirit and have seen nothing." **II. It is sensual in its purpose.** Its great design is to minister to the sensual enjoyments of the people. "I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink." The false prophets pleased the rich and emboldened the self-indulgence of all by promising abundant harvests and rich vintage. The promises of God are often emphasized, but the conditions of those promises are forgotten. Congregations are assured that without exception and without penitence they will be free from judgment and sure of salvation. False teachers pander to vitiated tastes, sanction sinful customs, and disturb not the consciences of the people. But true ministers strike the prejudices, condemn the carnal gratifications, and seek to save the souls of men. They handle not the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. **III. It is pleasing to the people in its method.** Unwelcome truths would not be heard, but a prophet of lies would be popular. "He shall even be the prophet of this people." Spiritual appetites crave for food, conscience is dissatisfied, and the heart restless. Men want rest and God. If any come in God's name to set them at ease in sensual pleasures, *him* will they receive with joy (Jer. v. 43). All they desire is freedom from reproof and licence to sin. "They teach their teachers how they wish to be mistaught," says a writer, "and receive the echo of their wishes as the voice of God." "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?" **IV. It is disappointing in its results.** It is "walking in the spirit," or "walking with *the wind*," as the margin gives. 1. There is *no nutriment for the soul*. It is a ministry empty and unsubstantial as the wind, mixed with error and falsehood, not "sound speech that cannot be condemned." 2. There is no *efficacy* in the word. It is not truth spoken in tenderness, love, and concern for the hearers. None are *enlightened* in

mind, *quickened* in conscience, and *converted* from sin. The words are mere echoes of the wind, devoid of results in heart and life, barren to God and man. "Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind; he daily increaseth lies and desolation."

The Glorious Future of Israel.—*Verses* 12, 13.

There is now a sudden transition from threatening to promise. Mercy is the end of all punishment to the penitent. A remnant shall be delivered and gathered together, increased and governed by Jehovah their Shepherd and King.

I. Israel shall be delivered. The captivity threatened will come; but, as of old, they shall be delivered from it. Babylon, no more than Egypt, can detain them in slavery. Iron gates and massive walls will give way before the Breaker's power. An entrance will be made into the city. The Conqueror will go in, and the captives *go out through it* into liberty and joy. The prison shall open and set them free. This deliverance from earthly Babylon is a type and pledge of redemption from spiritual bondage, by Christ Jesus. Men are bound in ignorance, prejudice, and sin. Christ gives light and redemption to the soul, and opens the prison to them that are bound. "He redeemed them from the hand of the enemy." **II. Israel shall be united again.** "I will surely assemble Jacob." They shall be gathered together in tenderness and care, in families and social privileges. God will bring his people from the greatest distance, and gather them into his fold. Public calamities and vicissitudes of fortunes hide not his face nor obliterate his covenant. Under the law believers could foresee, and under the gospel we may enjoy, this promise. 1. This gathering is *certain*. I will *surely* gather. 2. It is *constant*. The repetition indicates the progressive and persistent nature of the work. 3. It is *extensive*. Though God's people are a remnant, yet all shall be gathered, and not one forgotten. "*All* of thee." **III. Israel shall be increased.** Not a small number, but "the multitude of men." God can turn remnants into multitudes, and multiply his people as a flock. In the Church it shall be said, "The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell," &c. (Isa. xlix. 20). At last angels will gather the elect from the four winds into that "great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and people, and tongues." **IV. Israel shall be defended.** They will not be united and left to themselves or to others. God will possess them and rule them by his love. 1. They will be *secured as a flock*. "As the flock in the midst of the fold," in perfect peace and safety. 2. They will be *guided as a people*. "Their king shall pass before them." As in olden time, his presence shall go with them and make an easy passage through death and the grave to eternal life. 3. They will be *governed as a nation*. "The Lord on (at) the head of them." As a captain and conqueror to lead and rule them; to overcome all opposition, to "break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

The Breaker. Notice—1. The *object* in view. To set free. 2. The *opposition* to God's work. 3. The *destruction* of this opposition. Complete and utter ruin—*Breaker.*

The words present Christ as—1. The Redeemer. 2. The Guide. 3. The Defender of his people. "A magnificent transition from Cyrus to Christ, as in Isa. xl. 1—5. The Prophet sees the conqueror Cyrus breaking into Babylon, smiting asunder the bars which kept Israel captive, as in a prison; and how they went forth, after the issuing of his decree, in joy and triumph to their own land. And from this prophetical view of Cyrus and his victory, and its blessed consequences,

he passes on by a rapid prophetic flight to speak of the Divine Cyrus, Jesus Christ, and of his triumph over death and the grave [*Wordsworth*]. There is no passing on, nor going forth, without Christ our King, who is both King and Lord [*Jerome*].

Broken up. "The three verbs—they break through, they march through, they go out — describe in a pictorial manner progress which cannot be stopped by any human power [*Hengstenberg*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1, 2. *Covet fields.* No passion so deeply agitates and degrades, so effectually enslaves and destroys, the soul as covetousness. The man who sets his heart upon riches must be a stranger to peace and enjoyment. Fear, care, anxiety, suspicion, and jealousy place him on a constant rack. To the toil of getting is added the trouble of keeping his pelf. Avarice is insatiable as the grave, or rather as a gulf without bottom. The more this passion is supplied with fresh fuel the more vehement is the flame [*Rusticus*]. No houses, no fields content those who cannot rest in the lust of concupiscence. Yet only seven feet of earth will suffice them at last.

Ver. 4. *He hath divided our fields.* The land was but the outward symbol of the inward heritage. Unjust gain kept back is restored with usury; it taketh away the life of the owners thereof (Prov. i. 19). The vineyard whereof the Jews said, the inheritance shall be ours, was taken from them and given to others. So now is that awful change begun when Christians, leaving God, their only unchanging good, turn to earthly vanities, and for the grace of God which he withdraws have these only for their fleeting portion, until it shall be finally exchanged in the day of judgment [*Pusey*].

Ver. 7. *My words.* They do evil and injury to many. Thousands will curse for ever the hour they became acquainted with the Scriptures, for they derive from them only an increase of guilt and condemnation. But this is not the effect of design or of natural tendency in them, for the Bible is intended and adapted to do us good only, but is the accidental result of depravity; and therefore it is confined to those who pervert it, abuse it, neglect it, and thus turn the blessing into a curse [*Jay*].

Ver. 8, 9. *Women and children.*

"The cries of orphans, and the oppressor's rage
Doth reach the stars" [*Dryden*].

Ver. 10. *Not your rest.*

"This is the scene of combat, not of rest;
Man's is laborious happiness at best;
On this side death his dangers never cease,
His joys are joys of conquest, not of peace."

Ver. 11. The horrible subtlety of false teaching in each age or country is to meet its own favourite requirements, without calling for self-sacrifice or self-oblation, to give it a god, such as it would have, such as might content it. "The people willeth to be deceived, be it deceived," is a true proverb [*Pusey*].

Ver. 12, 13. *As the flock.* Now the sheep are scattered in all lands; but the shepherd shall search them out and bring them into the fold, where they shall be (*a*) constantly supplied, and (*b*) eternally safe from beasts of prey. *Breaker.* The image is not of conquest, but deliverance. *They break through,* not to enter in, but to pass through the gate, and *go forth.* The wall of the city is ordinarily broken through in order to make an entrance, or to secure to a conqueror the power of entering in at any time, or by age and decay. But here the object is expressed *to go forth.* Plainly they were confined before, as in a prison; and the gate of the prison was burst open to set them free (Cf. Isa. xliii. 6; xlviii. 20; lii. 11, 12 [*Pusey*].

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Punishment is threatened against the heads and leaders of Israel. **1. Princes** administrators of justice. **You**] Above every one. **To know**] To regard justice (Is. xlii. 21). **2. Pluck**] Proverbial for the greatest injustice and inhumanity (Ezek. xxii. 27: Zeph. iii. 3). **3. Flay**] Sets forth still more their barbarity and cruelty. **4. Then**] Time of punishment certain, seen and expressed. **Ill**] Lit. have made their deeds evil, reversing the call of the prophets (Jer. xxxv. 15). **5. Prophets**] False prophets flatter and promise security from judgment. **Bite**] Like serpents; cry, **Peace** When they are doing mischief **Prepare** Lit. "*sanctify war* against him (cf. Joel iii. 9); as if the cause of their own appetite were the cause of Heaven!" [*Words*]. **6. Night**] Calamities like a dark night would come upon them (Is. viii. 22; Amos v. 18; viii. 9). **7. Ashamed**] Because their predictions proved lies. **Confounded**] False prophets had no visions from God. "Their lying being punished in its results, they become, since God by no word of revelation helps them out of their necessity, entirely disgraced" [*Hitzig*]. **Cover** *i. e.* to cover the face up to the nose, a sign of sorrow (Lev. xiii. 45), here of shame (Ezek. xxiv. 17). With their lips they had lied, now they are dumb and covered with shame. "They shall be so ashamed of themselves as not *to dare to open their mouths*, or boast of the name of prophet" [*Calvin*]. **8. I**] In contrast to false prophets, am filled with power. **Judgment**] A sense of justice (Acts i. 8). **Might**] "Moral *intrepidity* in speaking the truth at all costs" (2 Tim. i. 7). **Sin**] Not to flatter with false promises of peace. **9. Hear**] Resumed from ver 1. **Heads**] Whose ungodly conduct is briefly summed up again. **Abhor**] As a thing loathsome and abominable (Heb.) **10. Build**] Lit. building with wealth and money obtained by bribes and murder of the innocent (Jer. xxii. 13: Ezek. xxii. 27: Hab. ii. 12). "Or by blood he may mean that they indirectly took away life, in that, through wrong judgments, extortion, usury, fraud, oppression, reducing wages, or detaining them, they took away what was necessary to support life" [*Pusey*]. **11. Reward**] Take bribes, when they should teach gratuitously (Lev. x. 11: Deut. xvii. 11) **Prophets**] False prophets. **Money**] "Giving the answer which their employers, the rich men, wanted, as if it were an answer from God" [*Pusey.*] **Among us**] Enthroned in the temple to protect us from calamity. **12. Therefore**] Culminating the threats of ver. 8, a great contrast to the conclusion of chapter II. They thought to build, when by their conduct they destroy Zion; "for *your* sake be plowed." "The predicates are divided rhetorically, and the thought is this: the royal palace, the city, and the temple shall be so utterly destroyed, that of all the houses and palaces only heaps of rubbish will remain, and the ground upon which the city stood will be partly used as a ploughed field, and partly overgrown with bushes" (cf. Is. xxxii. 13, 14) [*Keil*]. **Hezekiah's repentance delayed the execution of the judgment for more than a hundred years; but Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and by Titus.**

HOMILETICS.

THE PUNISHMENT OF UNGODLY MAGISTRATES.—*Verses* 1—4.

The prophet had denounced the sins of the people, now he threatens the civil rulers and religious teachers of the nation. The Judges of the law should have been exemplary in knowledge and virtue, but they were corrupt in thought, and ungodly in conduct.

I. **The sins of which they were guilty.** They are specially challenged by the prophet, and accused of no ordinary guilt. "Hear, I pray you." 1. *Sins against superior light.* They were expected to know and love the right. From the law of God, and the customs of the country, they knew the rules of equity. They had means of ascertaining the right, to administer impartial justice, and could not plead excuses for ignorance (Jer. v. 4). Affected ignorance and wilful neglect only aggravate God. Civil rulers sin against superior privileges, public sentiment, and moral law, when they pervert justice. "Is it not for you to know judgment?" 2. *Sins against responsible office.* They were the heads, the rulers of the people, but abused their authority and dishonoured their position. Instead of doing good, they loved evil. When teachers corrupt doctrine, and preachers withhold the gospel; when rulers and princes pervert equity, and neglect special duties for the defence of which they are put in office; they poison the stream of life and

turn it into deadly fountains. 3. *Sins against the claims of humanity.* They robbed the innocent, and devoured the helpless. Their furious rapacity surmounted every tie of humanity. Instead of feeding they fleeced the sheep, and sucked out the very blood of the people. The words indicate (*a*) Their *intense greed;* and (*b*) Their *inhuman cruelty* in satisfying it. But great men who oppress the poor, and hold themselves above law, will be accountable for their deeds and condemned for their cruelty. "Woe to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves; should not the shepherd feed the flock," &c. (Ezek. xxxiv. 2—4). **II. The punishment with which they are threatened.** Men cannot fare well if they do ill. A just God rules over all things, whom they wickedly forget. 1. *Punishment is certain.* "*Then,*" predicts the prophet, with solemn certainty. A day of retribution was before his mind. He warns them of it. Though unseen, it is fixed in the purpose of God, and will surely come upon them. 2. *Punishment is proportioned to their guilt.* "As they behaved themselves ill in their doings." God's law is unchangeable; those who show no mercy shall have judgment without mercy. (*a*) They will *cry and not be heard* in their distress. If the cries of the poor are disregarded by us, they will be heard against us (Ex. xxii. 23). Men should have a feeling heart and a helping hand; should count it not charity, but a duty and a privilege, to defend the poor. But covetousness hardens the heart and makes the ear deaf. A time is coming when the scorner and the oppressor will cry to God in vain. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard" (Prov. xxi. 13, 18, 41). (*b*) They *will be forsaken of God* in their distress. "He will even hide his face from them at that time." They cared not for others; God will, therefore, withhold his kindness and presence from them. Forsaken in heart and office, bereft of power and protection, they will be undone for ever. Before God, kings and paupers, priests and people, are treated according to their character and deserts. He is above all principalities and powers, and impartial in his rule. Usurped power shall be dethroned, and with the froward God will show himself froward. "Lo, this is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors which they shall receive of the Almighty."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. *Hate God and love evil.* This is an awful transformation of moral character. Man at first loves good, though he pursues evil. There is constant strife in the soul, to end which many quieten conscience and blind judgment. "Then they hate the truth or good with a bitter hatred, because it disturbs the darkness of the false peace with which they would envelop themselves." "Love of evil is always connected with hatred toward the good, although men commonly in practising evil keep up a semblance of love for the good" [*Lange*].

Ver. 3. He heaps up their guilt act by act. First they flay, *i. e.* take away their outer goods; then they break their bones in pieces, the most solid parts, on which the whole frame of their body depends, to get at the very marrow of their life, and so feed themselves upon them [*Pusey*]. Alas that kings and ecclesiastics should do the same things now! Men are robbed of the means of subsistence, cut to pieces, and treated like cattle—

> "And he that stands upon a slippery place,
> Makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up."
> [*Shakespeare.*]

Ver. 4. *As they behaved.* "Measure for measure" will ever be meted out to the evil-doer. "As I have done, so God hath requited me" (Judg. i. 7).

Vers. 1—4. A warning to judges. 1. Their responsibility as possessors of knowledge. 2. Their sin: violation of duty and self-seeking. 3. Their punishment [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

THE DESCRIPTION OF FALSE TEACHERS.—*Verses* 5—7.

From unjust judges Micah turns to false prophets, who are accused of flattering in sin and seducing by error. Corruption and crime in the nation will always endanger the Church. It is bad enough to be under ungodly rulers, but worse to be guided by false teachers.

I. **They are mercenary in their purpose.** Their chief end and only desire is gain. Rents and tithes, preferment and honour, govern their lives. Their god is their belly, filthy lucre their aim, and their "gospel is their maw"—supplied with food, they are satisfied and promise peace; but when no one puts anything into their mouths they are offended and intolerant. "They are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain." II. **They are deceptive in their teaching.** They flatter and mislead the people. "They make my people err." An unfaithful ministry carries the people from God and leaves them to perish in sin. "For the leaders of this people cause them to err, and they that are led of them are destroyed." 1. They deceive by *predicting prosperity* when there is danger. They cry peace when God threatens judgment. They bite with treachery and deadly poison in their mouths 2. They deceive by *flattering rebellion* when they should urge to repentance. They rebuked no extortion and excess. They soothed and smoothed the people, and fawned like greedy dogs to those who fed them. "Will ye pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies?" III. **They are hypocritical in their spirit.** "They even *sanctify* war against him" that withholds their due. Acting professedly on the authority of God, they abuse the word of God. Men now are denounced as "atheists" and "infidels," condemned as "disloyal" and "traitors," if they obey not the behests of the priest. Ecclesiastics threaten and discountenance, bless or curse, to get what they require. They rebuke only when their gains are disturbed, and comfort others to promote their own ends. IV. **They are judged in their ministry.** They promise what never comes to pass. Instead of peace they have calamity. 1. *They are darkened in their minds.* "Therefore, night shall be unto you." Moral obliquity shuts out the light, darkens the understanding, and brings judicial blindness. When teachers are dark, how can light be expected? "If the blind lead the blind," &c. 2. *They are silenced in their pretensions.* They pretended to do good, but sinned against light and were condemned by their own consciences. Deprived of power to *divine*, and robbed of an *answer* of God; they had neither vision nor courage to speak. They were seen in their true colours, and deciphered before the world. 3. *They were confounded in their ways.* Events put them to shame, reputation waned, and confidence failed them. They kept others in the dark; God kept them in the dark, and perplexed them with their own devices. When God's providence contradicts the religious teacher, he is seen to be opposed to God's will, and proved not to be sent of God. 4. *They were overwhelmed in their circumstances.* They preached falsehood, walked in darkness, and stumbled in distress. There was darkness without and darkness within, a night of sorrow and calamity. Their sun went down, and dark cold night settled upon them. They had to cover their lips and hold their tongue.

THE TRUE MINISTER.—*Verse* 8.

Micah now contrasts himself with the false prophets, sets forth the nature of the true ministry, which is one of Divine power, earnest appeal, and pure aim.

I. It is a ministry of power. "I am filled with power." 1. *Personal power.* Power lodged in him, controlling heart and life. 2. Power *exerted upon others*

Power must be in the soul, before it can be expressed in the doctrine. This will prove the Divine calling and vindicate the real character of a minister. 3. Power of the *highest nature.* "By the *Spirit of the Lord.*" Not the power of intellect and gifts, but "power from on high." "The power of God unto salvation." 4. Power in *the greatest degree.* "*Filled* with power." Here is no stint nor measure, except moral capacity. This is most needful, and the best furniture to the minister. Mr. Gladstone recently said that we had nothing to depend upon but moral power. "Tarry ye, until ye be endued with power from on high." Power in yourselves, power in your words, and power in the hearts of men. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." **II. It is a ministry of light.** "And of judgment." 1. *The minister himself is enlightened.* He is endowed with "a spirit of wisdom and knowledge." He has judgment to discern things that differ, to speak a word in season, from a sense of justice, a regard to truth, and not to please men. 2. *The doctrine which he preaches enlightens others.* It is *judgment;* an impartial view of God's word, righteous indignation against sin, and mercy to the penitent. He has an ardent love for souls, and great zeal for the glory of God. Under such a ministry, sinners are convinced, inquirers enlightened, and saints edified. **III. It is a ministry of courage.** "And of might." He feared not the wrath, nor flattered the sins of man. He had courage to brave danger, adhere to truth, and reprove the mighty. He was manly in his utterances, endued with spiritual boldness, and steeled against all opposition in declaring "unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin."

"Virtue is bold, and goodness never fearful" [*Shakespeare*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 8. Here we have a pattern ministry by which to test all others. Israel's prophets were demoralized, and had sadly declined from the dignity of the days of Samuel. The entrance of the earthly-minded and unspiritual into the sacred calling will be a curse to the nation. Here we perceive the distinction between a false and a true prophet, between a converted and an unconverted teacher, and the different ground, nature, and object of their office. There is with the true man, spirit, power, light, self-denial, wise temperance, pure, uncorrupted delivery of God's plan of salvation; and with the false, envy, imagination, self-love, which puffs up, personal gain, respect of persons, deception, &c. [*Lange*].

The Three Gifts of a true ministry. 1. Their Divine source. 2. Their human necessity. 3. Their practical design. All the fruits of one Spirit, all to qualify for the discharge of one duty, "to declare unto Jacob," &c. "So, then, of these three gifts *power* expresses the Divine might lodged in him; *judgment*, the substance of what he had to deliver; *might* or *courage*, the strength to deliver it in face of human power, persecution, ridicule, death" [*Pusey*].

Vers. 5—8. Warning to the Heralds of God's Word. 1. Their ideal character (ver. 8). 2. Their danger of darkening God's Word through self-seeking, in that either they for personal advantage preach what the ears of people lust after, or brand their personal enemies as God's enemies. 3. The aggravation of their sin; desecration of the Word; confusion of God's congregation. 4. Their punishment; they lose the capacity to discern God's Word, and speak to the disgust of others and of themselves [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

Guilty Leaders.—*Verses* 9—11.

The prophet gives a proof of his fidelity in reproving the rulers of the nation, civil and religious; briefly sums up the sins of which they were guilty, and which brought their ruin; and shows that all who are confident of God's favour will not escape his judgments.

I. Civil rulers perverted law for selfish aggrandisement. Rulers of the State should have been patterns of justice, but they despised it. 1. They *abhorred* judgment. Loathed it as abominable. Plato taught that if virtue could be seen by men, it would be attractive; but these judges knew and hated it. 2. They *perverted* judgment. They twisted and distorted it. Not only crushed individuals, but destroyed the foundation of justice. 3. They perverted *all judgment*, "all equity." Whatever was right and straight they made crooked. Natural conscience and God's law were both defied. They neither governed themselves by right, nor gave right to others. They encouraged others by their practice, and, as in the age of Nero, made nothing unlawful. 4. Their aim was to *build up Zion*. The rich built their palaces with wealth gained by fraud and oppression. The city was adorned with streets built by rapine and blood. The Lord looked "for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry." **II. Religious teachers expounded law for gain.** All are accused of bribery and mercenary conduct. Princes, priests, and prophets loved the wages of unrighteousness. 1. *Priests taught for hire.* They had maintenance assigned to them by God, had much by gratuity (1 Sam. ix. 7, 8), and should have made a difference between holy and unholy (Lev. x. 10, 11: Deut. xvii. 10, 11). But they sold what they should have given, and combined with the heads of the nation, with injustice. One class abused their power, another their knowledge; the judge perverted law, the priest misinterpreted it. 2. *Prophets divined for money.* False prophets gave answers to please those who paid them. As the oracles of Apollo were corrupted by the gold of Philip, so the law of God was sold for money. All sought their own, not the things of Christ, nor the interests of the people. "Thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous."

VAIN CONFIDENCE DESTROYED.—*Verses* 11, 12.

Notwithstanding their abominable conduct, yet the judges, priests, and prophets presume upon God's favour, and think that no evil will befall *them*. The prophet seeks to rouse them from their vain confidence.

I. They were confident of God's favour. "Is not the Lord among us?" Presumption feeds men with delusion. External privileges, outward reformation, ritual worship, will save no man. Those who lean upon these will dishonour God and destroy themselves. Perversion of truth and abuse of ordinances will drive God from us. "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord are we." **II. They were confident of security from evil.** "No evil can come upon us." We are perfectly safe whatever others say. Thus men are deluded in sin, and rocked to sleep in fatal security. If men are not restrained from evil by religious privileges, they can never be protected by them. Shake off carnal security, fear the Lord, and depart from evil. **III. They were doomed to destruction in their confidence.** "There shall Zion," &c. 1. *The city would be destroyed.* Its stately buildings were demolished, and its proud palaces reduced to *heaps*. The ground on which it stood was ploughed as a common field, and the site of the temple became wild as a forest. 2. *Their own sins had procured this ruin.* "For *your sake*." Sin will ever draw calamity in Church and State. Corrupt rulers and teachers involve the people in defection, and hasten on the judgment. They may think that they build, when they only destroy; that they secure prosperity, when they ruin it. Every sanctuary desecrated by hypocrisy will be demolished by the wrath of God. Instead of protecting, it will fall upon its worshippers, and great will be the fall of it. "Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood!"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 9. 1. Persons in eminency, accustomed to sin, are generally deaf to what the Lord saith. 2. The messengers of the Lord must not give up when their message is not received, but cry till either they get audience or have delivered their souls. *Hear, I pray you.* 3. It is the duty of faithful ministers, in reproving the faults of rulers, to be courteous, and not contemn authority. Hear, *ye heads*, &c. [Adapted from *Hutcheson*].

Ver. 10. *Building Zion* by wrong means is the way to pull it down. It can never stand erected by sinful materials, and for a selfish end. "Truly we *build up Zion with blood* when we cheapen luxuries and comforts at the price of souls, use Christian toil like brute strength, tempt men to dishonesty and women to other sin, to eke out the scanty wages which alone our selfish thirst for cheapness allows, heedless of everything save of our individual gratification, or of the commercial prosperity which we have made our god" [*Pusey*]. Righteousness builds up because it brings God's protection and blessing unrighteousness tears down because it brings God's curse [*Hengstenberg*].

Ver. 11. *Leaning.* 1. *Holy men* sometimes rest on official relationship with God, pollute the holiest things, and become a warning to others. 2. *Guilty men* will often lean upon the Lord, claim his protection, and flatter themselves into false security. "The sacred office is a grievous snare to unsanctified hearts," says one. "No ungodliness, pride secularity, and hypocrisy are so great as those which stand before God in association with the teaching of his Word."

Vers. 11, 12. False confidence in God. 1. *Its ground*, an outward temple—sacraments. 2. *Its danger*, disregard of the distant future, indifference, indulgence given to the natural man. 3. *Its end.* Fate of the Jewish state; the holy city becomes as the world, and shares the fate of the world. So likewise we. If we forsake God he will forsake us [*Lange*]

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Vers. 1—4. *Judgment.* It is neither the great man's power, nor the poor man's meanness, that a judge is to mind in judgment. A judge, a justice, must never cry out, "Oh, he is a poor man!" nor yet out of base fear cry out, "Oh, he is a great man!" The judges in Egypt were portrayed without hands and without eyes, to signify that they were not to take bribes, nor to accept men's persons [*Brooks*].

Ver. 3. *Eat flesh.*

> "Diseased nature oftentimes breaks forth
> In strange eruptions" [*Shakespeare*].

Vers. 5—7. *It shall be dark.* Misery assails riches as lightning does the highest towers; or as a tree that is heavy laden with fruit breaks its own boughs, so do riches destroy the virtue of their possessor [*Burton*].

Ver. 8. *Power.* The crowning power of the messenger of God is power over the moral man; power which, whether it approaches the soul through the avenue of the intellect or of the affections, *does* reach into the soul. The sphere of the Christian power is the heart,—the moral man; and the result of its action is not to be surely distinguished from that of mere eloquence by instantaneous emotion, but by subsequent moral fruit. Power which cleanses the heart and produces holy living is the power of the Holy Ghost [*Wm. Arthur*].

Vers. 9, 10. *Build.* The crimes of the people of England are not denounced by the pulpit as they should be; the abominations of royalty, the injustices perpetrated in the courts of justice, the cupidity of traders, the swindlings of joint-stock company men, by which they become millionnaires and win a seat in

the parliament of the nation. These things are not held up, as they should be, for public execration, in the broad sunlight of eternal truth [*Dr. Thomas*].

Ver. 11. *Money.* The priests of Rome aim but at two things—to get power from the king and money from the subject [*Selden*]. Gold is the fool's curtain, which hides all his defects from the world [*Feltham*].

> "They all the sacred mysteries of heav'n
> To their own vile advantages shall turn
> Of lucre and ambition" [*Milton*].

Ver. 12. *Zion ploughed.* At the time I visited this sacred ground, one part of it supported a crop of barley, another was undergoing the labour of the plough, and the soil turned up consisted of stone and lime, filled with earth, such as is usually met with in the foundations of ruined cities. It is nearly a mile in circumference [*Richardson's Travels*]. On the S.E. Zion slopes down, in a series of cultivated terraces, sharply, though not abruptly, to the sites of the king's gardens. Here and round to the S. the whole declivities are sprinkled with olive trees, which grow luxuriantly among the narrow slips of corn [*Porter*].

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The salvation of Zion is closely connected with its destruction, and a future glory awaits the mountain, which is a wild forest. **Last**] The days of Messiah, the completion of all things. **Mountain**] *i. e.* the whole city; its elevation, moral dignity, not local situation. **Estab.**] A permanent foundation. Heb. abidingly established. "An expression denoting continuance and perpetuity, that it shall continually remain on its settlement." **2. Many**] *All* nations (Isa. ii. 2: Matt. xxiv. 14); a powerful movement in the heathen world. **For**] The reason for such intense zeal in going up. **Law**] *i. e.* instruction in the ways of God; the law as a rule of holy life, the *Word* as the source of salvation. **3. Judge**] Instead of nations going to war (Isa. ii. 4). **Rebuke**] Convict (Jer. xvi. 8, 9); lit. to set right, settle disputes. **Many**] In contrast to one nation, which formerly acknowledged Jehovah; "who were hitherto for the most part inclined of their own will to grasp the sword" [*Hengst.*]. **Beat**] implements of war into implements of peace. **4. Sit**] An image of safety even in open fields (cf. 1 Kings iv. 25: Lev. xxvi. 6). **5. Name**] *i. e.* profession, and in the strength of Jehovah (cf. 1 Sam. xvii. 45: Zech. x. 12: Prov. xviii. 10). Heathen gods can do nothing for them. **6. Halteth**] Like sheep wearied in a journey. "Limping denotes the miserable condition into which the dispersed have been brought" (cf. Psal xxxv. 15; xxxviii. 18). [*Keil*]. This salvation will not fail, for all the miserable and scattered shall be assembled. **7. Reign**] Expresses a perfect monarchy, as it never existed in present or past. "Micah does not mention the descendants of David here, but Jehovah himself, not to exclude the kingdom of David, but to show that God will prove that he was the author of that kingdom, and that all power is his. The prophet therefore indicates a certain difference here between that shadowy kingdom and the new kingdom which God will openly manifest at the advent of the Messiah" [*Calvin*]. **8. Tower**] Keeping up the metaphor from sheep, Jerusalem is the tower from which the king guards the flock. Messiah the Shepherd (chap. v. 3); Israel the sheep (chap. vii. 14). **Unto thee**] Affirms more than to thee; expressing the conquest of every obstacle that blocks up the way to the goal *Keil*]. **9.**] Zion will lose her king, wander into captivity, but will be redeemed from her enemies. **King**] Loss of royal government, the cause of lamentation, more painful to Israel than other people: the king a sign of God's presence, &c. **10. Pain**] Fig. of a woman with child (cf. Jer. iv. 31) **Out of the city, &c.**] Set forth the greatness and certainty of the calamity. **There . . thee**] Emphatic declaration; the scene of distress, the place of deliverance. **11.**] Distant sunlight overclouded by present cloud. **Now**] Nations gathered not to hear the law (ver. 2), but for war. **Defiled**] Like a virgin. **12. Gather them**] To be punished in turn when they have answered his purpose, when fully ripe, like sheaves, lit. sheaf. However great the numbers of the foe, all are but as one sheaf ready to be threshed [*Calvin*]. **13. Arise**] Deut. xxv. 4. **Horn**] To push the enemies (1 Kings xxii. 11). **Gain**] Goods collected by robbery (Judges v. 19). **Lord**] Not for Zion's selfish ends (Isa. lx. 6, 9). **Whole earth**] Who through subjugating the heathen has proved to be such (Ps. xciii., xcvi.).

HOMILETICS.

THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE.—*Verses* 1—4.

Mount Zion is not doomed to be a perpetual waste. A glory is here predicted which it has not yet realized; but its chastisement shall end in mercy and moral dignity. It will become the residence of God and the centre of nations.

I. The moral elevation of the Church. The elevation here is not physical, but moral; a spiritual exaltation. 1. *Its eminent site.* "The tops of the mountains," &c., "exalted above the hills." It is pre-eminently above all worldly heights. Above earthly potentates and above idols. Other eminences are insignificant compared to this mountain. Its doctrine and design, its author and its life, are above the wisdom of men. Small in its beginning, it shall grow and shine with greater lustre than kingdoms of this world. Lower than they, it will rise above and overtop them all. "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid." 2. *Its impregnable nature.* It shall "be established." Exalted, it shall be established above human institutions. Human elevation is unstable. This is built upon a rock, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Its foundations are in the holy mountains (Psal. lxxxvii. 1); its head stands securely aloft, between heaven and earth, and it rests, unassailable and serene, upon the purpose of God. "Mount Zion cannot be removed, but abideth for ever."

II. The attractive power of the Church. As a dominant, supreme power, it will be attractive to all nations. 1. *As the centre of numbers.* "Many nations shall come." It shall not be confined to one people nor locality. "I will make of thee a great nation." "People shall flow into it;" indicating multitude and eagerness. Like a river, distant peoples shall come and throng in one continuous stream. A flood once covered the highest mountains and destroyed everything on the face of the earth. But this river shall bring spiritual life and fertilize the universe "They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord." 2. *As the place of instruction.* They go to know God and to learn his ways; not to be amused with idle speculations and novel theories. They go for grace, to practise what they know, to "hear of heaven and learn the way." Religious instruction has ever been connected with Divine worship. The more we know of God, the more anxious shall we be to praise and please him. "He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." 3. *As the residence of God.* "The house of the God of Jacob." More glorious than the tabernacle and the temple of old. This is the pavilion of God's splendour, the place where his honour dwelleth. Here he dwells and displays special signs of grace. "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts." 4. *As the seat of empire.* "And he shall judge among many people." God will here fix his throne and exercise spiritual rule over the world. He will rebuke the proud, convict the sinner, and subdue all things to himself. Tyrants and thrones, idolatries and superstitions, shall fall before the power of the Gospel "For the law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

III. The abiding prosperity of the Church. The Gospel is a rule of order and peace; brings tranquillity and prosperity to all people. 1. *Wars shall cease.* In the best governed states we see restlessness, suspicion, and insecurity. Kingdoms have been torn by civil and subdued by foreign wars. But here Jew shall not hate Gentile; implements of strife shall be instruments of peace; and nations shall learn war no more. 2. *Social quietness shall be enjoyed.* Vineyards shall be possessed by the poor; the fig, the characteristic fruitfulness of Palestine, shall not decay; and every one shall sit in domestic harmony. Each will be content and undisturbed in his lot. Abundance of peace shall mark the future Church. In secrecy men will sit securely, and openly walk in perfect safety. "None shall make them afraid." This glorious future seems almost impossible, judging from

the present. But God has purposed, and will bring it to pass. "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. *Flow.* The metaphor of flowing importeth the coming of people to Christ by the preaching of the Gospel. 1. Freely (Psal. cx. 3). 2. Swiftly, as the waters of the river Tigris; swift as an arrow out of a bow (see Isa. lx. 8). 3. Plentifully, by whole nations turned to the faith, and giving up their names to Christ. 4. Jointly, as ver. 2 (Zech. viii. 21). 5. Zealously, bearing down all obstacles that would dam up their way. 6. Constantly and continually, as rivers run perpetually, by reason of the perennity of their fountains; and are never dried up, though sometimes fuller than others; as rivers swell oft with sudden showers and overflow the banks, so, beyond all expectation, many times doth God propagate his truth, enlarging the bounds of his Church with new confluxes of converts [*Trapp*].

Ver. 2. *Let us go up.* 1. The object of their journey. "The mountain of the Lord." 2. The spirit in which they undertake it. "And say, Come, let us," &c. (1) A spirit of fervour. (2) A spirit of mutual love. "Exhorting one another, as Andrew exhorted his brother Simon, and Philip Nathaniel, and the woman of Samaria those of her city, to come to Christ; and so all since, who have been won by him, by word or example, by preaching or by deed, in public or in private, bring along with them others to seek him whom they themselves have found" [*Pusey*]. 3. The worthy end they have in view. "He will teach us of his ways." "They come in holy simplicity to learn whatever he will condescend to teach them; in holy confidence, that he, the Infallible Truth, will teach them infallibly." 4. The practical result. "We will walk in his paths."

Law out of Zion. 1. The blessing issued. "*Law.*" Not mere doctrine or religion; not the Jewish law: but law (without the article) as the rule of life (Prov. vi. 23; xxviii. 4), which should be revealed to heathen nations (Lam. ii. 9: Isa. ii. 3). 2. The method of its issuing. "*Go forth.*" A personal, direct act of God; a continual influence of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit in the Church and Christian experience. 3. The centre from which it issues. Out of Zion and Jerusalem.

Vers. 3, 4. The universal spread of the Gospel. Modern theories of the future exposed and refuted. The guarantees for the fulfilment of this prediction and its benefits described. This prophecy is fulfilled — (1) In the character of the Gospel. (2) The prophecy has been fulfilled, within and without, among individuals or bodies of men, in body or mind, in temper or in deed, as far as the Gospel has prevailed [*Pusey*].

The cessation of war an effect of the prevalence of Christianity [*Foster's Lectures*, vol. ii.].

"No more shall nation against nation rise,
Nor ardent warriors meet with hateful eyes,
Nor fields with gleaming steel be covered o'er,
Nor brazen trumpets kindle rage no more:
But useless lances into scythes shall bend,
And the broad falchion in a ploughshare end"
[*Pope—The Messiah*].

HOMILETICS.

Christianity the only Guarantee for Better Days.—*Verse 5.*

The prophet has just predicted a bright future for the Church. But Jehovah alone can bring it to pass. "*For*" idols are impotent, and those who worship them can do nothing. Christianity is the only hope of mankind. Human systems can never accomplish the work of God.

I. Ancient systems did not bring better days. What have the myths of Egypt, Persia, and India done? What did the religions of Greece and Rome accomplish? Many nations excelled in wealth, intelligence, and refinement, but

were degraded in morals. Religion is always more potent than philosophy and culture. The latter can never affect the former. An inferior never changes the character of a superior power. Hence false religions become worse, gravitate to the centre of evil, and lose all influence to elevate and bless the world. **II. Modern systems cannot bring better days.** If history and experience determine the fate of nations in the past; if Christianity has been the *only* power to cope with heathenism and eradicate evil, will the verdict for the future differ from the past? We may advance in commercial prosperity, education, and civilization, without improvement and elevation in morals. The religions of intellect and of emotion, of imagination and sentiment, the theories of philosophy and utility—which are the boast of the present day—will never abolish war and bring the anticipated millennium. In man we cannot trust. In systems half-human and half-divine we have no guarantee for the future. Our faith must stand not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. With this we shall be safe, happy, and triumphant. God has promised, and will accomplish better days.

> "'Tis coming on the hills of time,
> And this old world is growing brighter;
> We may not see its dawn sublime,
> But high hopes make the heart throb lighter."

The Zeal of Idolaters an Incentive to Christian Life.

We may take ver. 5 as a resolution of Jewish and Gentile converts to cling to God and walk in his ways, exciting themselves by the example and spirit of idolaters, who were zealous and pertinacious in their ungodly course.

I. Every one has a god. It is a trite but true saying that man will worship. If he does not love the true, he will a false god—an idol. Under the Gospel, and in heathen nations, idolatry is prevalent. **II. Every one makes a profession of his god.** "Every one *in the name* of his god"—that is, under the law and in conformity to the will of his god. 1. It is an *open profession.* They are not afraid nor ashamed of their profession. 2. It is a *consistent profession.* They "*walk*" in the fear, and not against the authority, of their god. Their moral conduct does not contradict their religious faith. 3. It is a *stedfast profession.* They "*will walk.*" They were constant and persevering in their practice. They were determined not to forsake their worship; for a nation will seldom change its gods (Jer. ii. 11). 4. It is a *universal profession.* For *all* will walk, "*every one,*" &c. Hence if these idolaters were so earnest and resolute, what should we do? says the prophet. Their ardour should kindle our indifference; their exactness shame our inconsistency; and their numbers provoke our efforts. Our confession and resolution should be, "*We will walk* in the name of the Lord *our* God." This not occasionally, for since there is nothing unreasonable or wearying in this service, it should be "*for ever and ever.*"

The Kingdom of Christ.—*Verses* 6—8.

From the salvation promised even those that are scattered abroad and dwelling in misery will not be excluded. God will finally remove all impediments and bring his people together into one glorious and perpetual kingdom in Christ Jesus.

I. The seat of the kingdom. "The Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion." Zion is the place from which the law went out (ver. 2), and a type of the Christian Church (Isa. xl. 9; lii. 7). Jerusalem was the special abode of Jehovah, the seat of theocratic government, and the centre of prescribed worship. The Church now is the Mount of God, for elevation and dignity. Here he deigns to dwell, to bless his people, and rule the world. "The city of the Great King." **II. The subjects of the kingdom.** Jew and Gentile, the distant and most degraded, will be gathered together. Persons that are despised and forgotten by

human governments, the indigent, and the poor, will become citizens of the Great King. 1. *The morally weak.* "Her that halteth." Men are spiritually tired, maimed, and disjointed. Moral halting had been the chief sin of Israel, serving God and Baal (1 Kings xviii. 21). Men halt, hesitate, and counterfeit in God's service now. 2. *The hopelessly scattered.* "Her that is driven out." Jews carried away by force, and Gentiles led by dumb idols (1 Cor. xii. 2). All that are dispersed like a flock from the fold of God. "I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out" (Zeph. iii. 16). 3. *The grievously distressed.* "Her that I have afflicted." Men are not merely driven out from God, but are sick and afflicted in body and mind. When God afflicts them they are specially dear to him. All grievances shall be redressed, and all distempers healed. "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick" (Ezek. xxxiv. 13—16). **III. The glory of the kingdom.** The glory of the theocracy was obscured by the sins of kings and priests. Earthly monarchies decay and undergo eclipse; but the glory of this kingdom excelleth. 1. *It will be dignified.* The kingdom will come to the Church with a glory exceeding "even the first dominion." It will shine with a greater lustre than the reigns of David and Solomon. 2. *It will be strong.* "A strong nation." (*a*) Strong *in numbers.* The remnant scattered and depressed shall be restored and multiplied, like the stars of heaven or the sands on the sea-shore. (*b*) Strong *in victory.* It will no more be subdued by petty monarchs or neighbouring confederacies. But its strength is not human might, temporal greatness; but strong in spiritual warfare, in faith, and achievements. "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation." 3. *It will be perpetual.* The Lord shall reign over them, "even for ever." The valour and strength of David, the honour and wisdom of Solomon, were but shadows of this kingdom. The King eternal is not subject to mortality, nor exposed to danger. The glory of the Church and the height of its felicity are the constant presence and prerogatives of Christ Jesus. "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 5. *Contrasts in worship.* 1. Men of the world reject God. 2. Men of the world worship their own god. 3. But Christians are determined to love and serve Jehovah. That which is the scandal to the world, to them is a motive to firmness and to union. There are different persuasions in the world, let us be true and cleave together in the right way. "We will walk in the name of the Lord."

Vers. 6—8. *The flock of Christ.* 1. The flock in a state of helplessness. Halt, scattered, and afflicted. 2. The flock gathered together by the Good Shepherd. Gathered by providence and found by grace. 3. The flock defended. From the "tower of the flock," they are—(1) inspected; (2) environed; (3) shielded. The Church is designed to be a defence and tower of spiritual strength. "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered together unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem."

Ver. 7. *The Lord shall reign.* As King, he—1. Of rebels makes them subjects, willing to be ruled by him. 2. He preserves them in that privilege by his Spirit. 3. He gives them laws far better than those of the twelve tables in Rome, which yet far exceeded (saith Cicero) all the learned libraries of the philosophers in worth and weight. 4. He sweetly inclineth their wills to yield universal obedience thereunto, and to cross themselves so they may please him. 5. He rewards them with comfort and peace here, and with life eternal hereafter. 6. He destroys all the enemies of his Church, and then, at last,

delivers up the kingdom to his Father (1 Cor. xv. 24); not his essential kingdom as God, but his economical kingdom as mediator [*Trapp*].

Ver. 8. The world is a field, the Church a fold in that field; and a strong fold (strong as a tower), yea, a stronghold; Ophel, as it is styled in the next words; and that of the daughter of Zion, that is, of the Christian Church, the inviolable security whereof is here noted [*Ibid.*].

Come and arrive. He twice repeats the assurance, in equivalent words, for their fuller assurance, "to make the good tidings the gladder by repeating and enforcing them" [*Pusey*].

Vers. 1—8. *The kingdom of God.* 1. *Its central point:* the glorified and exalted Zion, the source of the statutes and revelations; and through grace, the ancient, chosen seat of God's dominion. 2. *Its citizens:* those who flow towards it thirsting for righteousness, longing for salvation. 3. *Its order:* God's law and God's peace (ver. 3). 4. *Its blessedness:* rest, security, prosperity (ver. 4). 5. *Its duration:* eternal, like God himself (ver. 5) [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

THE SUFFERING AND TRIUMPH OF GOD'S PEOPLE.—*Verses* 9—13.

Israel's history, like human life, has its dark and its bright side. Before the glory promised is ever gained, sorrow and trial must be endured. This is—1. A constant rule; and—2. A necessary order in God's discipline. But the scene of trial was to be the place of deliverance. The sufferings shall be over-ruled for the salvation of his people and the destruction of their enemies. Notice:—

I. The bitterness of the affliction. "Pangs have taken thee," &c. Pangs without remedy, and painful as a woman in travail. 1. *The loss of kings.* "Is there no king in thee?" A visible king was a protection, and a symbol of God's presence to them. The loss was most serious and irreparable. It was a condition of helplessness and shame. 2. *The loss of counsellors.* "Is thy counsellor perished?" Kings and judges were their counsellors and guides; but they were bereft of wisdom to direct, left in the hands of the enemy, and governed by captive nations. 3. *The loss of liberties.* "Now shalt thou go forth out of *the city*," which shall be captured; "dwell in the *field*" exposed to danger; and be carried "even to Babylon" into long captivity. This was a sad exchange of liberty and luxury for bondage and misery. But it is the picture of many a soul reduced to slavery, bereft of God and writhing in agony. **II. The comforts under the affliction.** All is not lost, though they have neither king nor counsellor. God will make up for everything. 1. *Affliction will end in good.* "Jerusalem's pangs are not as dying agonies, but as travailing throes, which after a while will be forgotten for joy that a child is born into the world." Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning (Ps. xxx. 6; lxxiii. 24: Jer. x. 24). 2. *Deliverance will be granted.* "There shalt thou be delivered." *There*, where sorrow is greatest and hope is faintest—even in Babylon, the most unlikely place, "the Lord shall redeem thee." The utmost degree of affliction is often the nearest to the end, and help is not in the holy city, but in the stronghold of the foe. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." The Red Sea must be the scene of triumph to Israel, and the prison the place of deliverance to Joseph and Peter. This magnifies God's grace and power. "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream." 3. *Enemies will be subdued.* "Thou shalt beat in pieces many people." In their weakness, God will be their strength, and make them victorious over confederate nations. Their horns shall be *iron*, to push their enemies; and their hoofs *brass*, to tread them down. The destruction is universal and complete. All enemies shall be put under their feet, as conquered foes, or willing subjects. "Fear not, thou worm Jacob. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth: thou shalt thresh

the mountains and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff" (Is. xli. 13—15). III. The spirit in which they should bear the affliction. If such be their prospects in the trial, how should they demean themselves? 1. They should cherish a *patient spirit.* "Why dost thou cry out aloud?" Calm fear and hush grief; though affliction be grievous at present, it shall afterward yield the fruits of joy and peace. Patience defeats the menace of the foe, but passion takes his part

"Patience doth conquer by out-suffering all" [*Peel*].

2. They should cherish a *submissive spirit.* "Be in pain," &c. Grieve, but remember excessive grief, fretfulness, and rebellion, are unreasonable. Resistance is folly, submission is triumph.

"By not opposing, thou dost ills destroy,
And wear thy conquered sorrows into joy" [*Young*].

3. They should cherish *a spirit of hope.* What a bright prospect opens up before them! Why doubt or despair? God will accomplish his word. Hope will sweeten trial, and, like the sun, paint the rainbow on the clouds. "Black though *our* side of the canvas be," said Sir Harry Vane, in going to be executed, "the Divine hand paints a beautiful picture on the unseen side."

THE DESTRUCTION OF ZION'S FOES.—*Verses* 11—13.

Those who exult in Israel's fall, and seek to defile and outrage her, will be disappointed. Inscrutable wisdom will correct the children with the foe, and then destroy the foe with the children.

I. They are frustrated in their design. "Let her be defiled," &c. 1. They *sought her injury.* They desired to defile her with blood, and condemn her in guilt. The wicked delight in the fall and inconsistencies of God's people. They often become tempters, then accusers; "first desecrators, then sanctimonious justiciaries," says one. 2. *They feasted their eyes on her misery.* "Let our eye look upon Zion." The world always hates the Church and rejoices in its sorrow. Edom delighted in the chastisement of Israel (Obad. 12.); and the sufferings of the martyrs were a spectacle to the heathen. Malice is blind to all virtue, and eyes can always see what hearts can wish. "Yea, they opened their mouth wide against me, and said, Aha, aha, our eye hath seen it." II. They are crushed in their efforts. "Many nations are gathered against thee." The powers of earth and hell are sometimes arrayed against the Church, but all in vain. They are against God when against his people. They may have wickedness to imagine, craft to devise, but are not able to perform (Ps. xxi.). God knows their thoughts, but they cannot defeat his purpose. Pharaoh's counsel to extinguish issued in the increase of the chosen people. The wisdom, power, and counsel of man signify nothing, if they oppose the decrees of God. "He taketh the wise in their craftiness." Learn—1. The folly of designing against God. 2. The security of obedience to God. III. They are ruined in their numbers. "Many nations" combined against Zion. The armies of Babylon, with their subject nations, the forces of Edom, Ammon, Moab, and others, who exulted in Judah's fall, were types of the anti-Christian powers of the latter days. Neither numbers nor craft avail before God. They only ripen themselves for God to "gather them as the sheaves into the floor."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 9, 10. I. *The moral condition of men.* Kingless and restless, in captivity and misery. Unable to cope with sin, evil habits, and the world. Without the privileges of that city, whose builder and maker is God; exposed to danger, tumult, and the distractions of life. II. *The purpose of God concerning men.* To

redeem, to govern, to guide, and to exalt above all misery and opposition. He will shortly bruise Satan under their feet, and every power of body and mind shall be consecrated to him.

Vers. 11, 12. *The enemies of Zion.* 1. Their number. 2. Their purpose,—to defile and rejoice. 3. Their spirit—proud and determined. 4. Their helplessness. "They know not the thoughts of God." 5. Their ruin. "He shall gather them," &c. God's people begin, and he will finish, the work.

Gather them as sheaves. Persecutors. 1. *Ripened* by their own conduct. 2. *Gathered* by the providence of God. 3. *Threshed* by the judgments of God. "This prophecy received a primary and partial fulfilment in the victories of the Maccabees (1 Macc. v. 1). But its adequate accomplishment is in Christ. It is to be applied to the work of the apostles, and apostolic men, missionaries of Christ, who are compared by St. Paul to oxen treading out the corn (1 Cor. ix. 9 : 1 Tim. v. 18 : cf. Is. xxxii. 20). Their work is indeed one of bringing the nations into subjection (2 Cor. ii. 14 ; x. 5 : Eph. vi. 12) ; but it is in subjection to the law of love, in order that the good grain winnowed from the sheaves on the floor may be gathered into the garner of heaven" (cf. Ps. cxlix. 8) [*Wordsworth*].

Ver. 13. The very image of the threshing implies that this is no mere destruction. While the stubble is *beaten* or bruised to small pieces, and the chaff is far more than the wheat, and is carried out of the floor, there yet remains the seed-corn. So in the great judgments of God, while most is refuse, there yet remains over what is severed from the lost heap, and wholly *consecrated* to him [*Pusey*].

The Lord of the whole earth. 1. God the supreme ruler of the world. Not merely the God of Israel, but ruler "of the whole earth." 2. All things governed in the interests of the Church. The nations subject to Zion, not for selfish aggrandisement, but for her good and his glory (Isa. lx. 6, 9 ; xxiii. 18). 3. The glory of victory should be given to God. All gains of merchandise, all achievements of intellect, all success of spiritual efforts, spring from him, and should be consecrated to him. Holiness to the Lord should be written on all things we do.

Vers. 9—13. *Of the struggles of God's congregation.* They must be maintained : 1. Under heavy sorrow, in secure expectation of their final redemption (vers. 9, 10). 2. Under the mighty assaults of the foe, in sure confidence that the Lord sits upon the throne (vers. 11, 12). 3. In constant self-examination. For although the victory must certainly be given to God's cause (ver. 13), nevertheless, until Christ is born in the congregation (and in each individual, ver. 1), the result of every contest is deserved disaster and disgrace (ver. 13) [*Lange*].

The whole chapter sets forth—1. The glory ; 2. The peace ; 3. The dominion ; and, 4. The victory of the Church.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IV.

Vers. 1, 2. *Last days.* God's promises are dated, but with a mysterious character ; and for want of skill in God's chronology, we are prone to think God forgets us, when, indeed, we forget ourselves in being so bold to set God a time of our own, and in being angry that he comes not just then to us [*Gurnall*].

Ver. 3. *War.* There must be peace when the art of war is laid by as useless, and shall be learned no more. That will be a blessed time, indeed, when the art military shall be out of date, and (being itself the greatest interrupter of learning) shall be learned no more. When soldiers shall turn husbandmen and vine-dressers. When a man casts away his sword we may well conclude he intends to be quiet. Thus the Lord gives quiet to nations which have been engaged in war, by causing wars to cease [*Caryl*].

Ver. 4. Peace of country life.

"In all things grew his wisdom and his wealth
And folk beholding the fair state and health

Wherein his land was, said that now at last
A fragment of the Golden Age was cast
Over the place, for there was no debate,
And men forgot the very name of hate."
[*Wm. Morris.*]

Vers. 6—8. As the pleasures of the future will be spiritual and pure, the object of a good and wise man in this transitory state of existence should be to fit himself for a better, by controlling the unworthy propensities of his nature and improving all his better aspirations; to do his duty, first to God, then to his neighbour; to promote the happiness and welfare of those who are in any degree dependent upon him, or whom he has the means of assisting; never wantonly to injure the meanest thing that lives; to encourage, as far as he can, whatever is useful and tends to refine and exalt humanity; to store his mind with such knowledge as it is fitted to receive, and he is able to attain; and so to employ the talents committed to his care that, when the account is required, he may hope to have his stewardship approved [*Southey*].

Ver. 9. *King.*

"Kings are like stars—they rise and set—they have
The worship of the world, but no repose."
[*Shelley.*]

Vers. 8—10. *The kingdom shall come.* Observe, it is a kingdom that is to come to us; we are not to go to it. Also, it is not to be a kingdom of the dead, but of the living. Also, it is not to come all at once, but quietly; nobody knows how. "The kingdom cometh not with observation" [*Ruskin*].

Vers. 10, 11. It belongs, in truth, to the Church of God to suffer blows, not to strike them. But at the same time let it be remembered that the Church is an anvil which has worn out many a hammer [*Beza*].

Ver. 12. *Thoughts of the Lord.* To those, the eyes of whose understandings are enlightened, and the avenues of their hearts opened to discern and adore the perfections of God, how manifold are the instances which occur of the providence of God interfering to direct the course of human events towards a salutary end; to make afflictions of men the by-path to enjoyment; out of evils, temporal and transitory, to produce substantial and permanent good [*Bp. Mant*].

Ver. 13. Hope doth three things: it assures good things to come; it disposes us for them; it waits for them unto the end, each of which will be of singular use to fit us for pious sufferings [*Polhill*].

Arise. When God has conquering work for his people to do, he will furnish them with strength and ability for it; will make the horn iron and the hoofs brass: and, when he does so, they must exert the power he gives them, and execute the commission; even the daughter of Zion must arise and thresh [*Matt. Henry*].

CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL NOTES. **Thou**] invading army (not Judah). **Us**] The prophet identifies himself with the nation. **Smite**] The greatest insult (Lam. iii. 30: Matt. v. 39: xxvii. 30). **Judge**] or king (Amos ii. 3). **2. Beth.**] The ensuing prophecy (vers. 1—5) combined with what goes before and what follows, consummates the witness of the O. T. concerning Christ, and is the groundwork of his history in the New [*Words.*]. **Eph.**] To distinguish it from another Beth. in Zebulon (Josh. xix. 10, 15). **Little**] So insignificant in size and population that it was not enumerated among the cities of Judah (Josh. xv. 21); nor in the list (Neh. xi. 25); it became a city under Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi. 6). **Thous.**] Tribes divided into thousands, over which a leader presided, and commanded them in war (Ex. xviii. 21, 25: Num. i. 16): Deut. i. 15). 'Family' is given, Judg. vi. 15. **Out**] Lit. shall one come forth to me to be ruler. **Out of**] Beth., as his native place, antithetic to. **From of old**] Lit. from the days of eternity; expressing the eternity of Christ's Divine nature and

person [*Gill*]; and the displays of his power of old from everlasting, which may be referred to his covenant engagements, and to the work of creation [*Boothr.*]. **3. Therefore**] On account of this fixed plan of God, his people will be given up to suffer, until **she**] "the virgin" mother of Jesus (Isa. vii. 14); or the people of Judah, from whom a ruler was to come forth (Gen. xlix. 10). Suffering is the necessary travail-pain which precedes the joy of birth. **Then**] Blessings described which result from the Messiah's birth. **Rem.**] The remainder, not only inhabitants of Judah left from the judgment, but members of the revolted ten tribes; all Israelites dispersed in foreign lands. Only *brethren*, sons of Israel, his race, have the right to return. **4. Feed**] Lit. rule (Matt. ii. 6) [*margin*]; (Isa. xl. 11). **Stand**] Persevering and diligent, in the attributes and name of his God, *i. e.* one in relation and purpose with Jehovah (Isa. ix. 5). **They**] Returned remnant. **Abide**] Dwell in perfect peace and security (cf. chap. iv. 4: Isa. xiv. 30). **Now**] in the fulfilment. **He**] Alone (cf. Joel ii. 20, 21: Luke i. 32). **5 Man**] Heb. *this*, emphatic (Gen. v. 29); the cause or author of *peace* between God and man (Zech. ix. 10: Eph. ii. 14, 17: Col. i. 20). **Seven and eight**] Numbers complete, victorious, and contrasted with the enemy (Job v. 19: Prov. vi. 16). **Prin.**] Shepherds equivalent to princes or rulers (Jer. vi. 3: Nahum iii. 18). **6. Entrances**] The borders where garrisons and its chief strength lie (2 Kings iii. 21). **Waste**] Lit. eat up; the metaphor of shepherds (Num. xxii. 4). **Sword**] With her own naked swords (Ps. lv. 21). **He**] Messiah. **7. Rem.**] Shall quicken and have the same influence as imperceptible **dew**] (Deut. xxxii. 2: Ps. lxxii. 6). An earnest of greater blessings hereafter (Isa. lxvi. 19: Zech. viii. 13). **Showers**] From *dābăr*, to multiply, multitudes of drops; from God, and independent of human agency, as dew and rain. **8. Lion**] To take vengeance on her enemies (Isa. lxvi. 15, 16: Zech. xii. 3—6; xiv. 17, 18); and strike terror into all opponents. A prediction of victory under the Maccabees and after-times. **9.**] Exultant feeling; *High be thy hand* (Isa. xxvi. 11) to destroy the foe (Exod. xiii. 9). **10. Horses**] All human resources on which to depend (Isa. ii. 6—8: Ps. xx. 7). "The Church will never be safe till she is stripped of all creature-trusts, and rests on Jehovah alone" [*Calvin*]. **11. Cities**] Salvation so complete that neither forces nor strongholds would be wanted. **12. Witch.**] Such offences would be no more found amongst them (cf. Isa. ii. 6—8). **Sooth.**] Signmongers by hand and observations of the sky. **13. Images**] *Graven* idols made of wood or metal. **Stand.**] Statues, stone-images, or stones dedicated to idols (1 Kings xiv. 23). "Thou shalt no more be an idolatrous people" [*A. Clarke*]. **14. Groves**] Lit. "Stems of trees, or posts standing upright, or set up as idols, which were dedicated to the Canaanitish goddess of nature" (cf. Ex. xxxiv. 13) [*Keil*]. **Cities**] In or near which idolatrous groves were planted (2 Kings x. 25). "These two rather subordinate objects are mentioned *instar omnium*, to express the entire abolition of war and idolatry" [*Keil*]. **15.**] The Lord will take vengeance upon nations that have not heard, *i. e.* not hearkened or obeyed his voice. "In other words, he will exterminate every ungodly power by a fierce judgment, so that nothing will ever be able to disturb the peace of his people and kingdom again" [*Keil*].

HOMILETICS.

THE CHURCH MILITANT—*Verse* 1.

Calamities are to precede prosperity. Lest Israel should fall into carnal security, she is warned of her danger, and roused to defend herself. Zion, in her warlike attitude, is a type of the Church militant.

I. She is endangered by the foe. "He hath laid siege against us." In this world the Christian Church is engaged in conflict and exposed to suffering. The powers of evil have arrayed themselves against her. Infidelity, popery, and persecution have besieged her gates. Sin threatens her character, liberty, and existence. The foes are numerous, strong, disciplined to arms, and possessing manifold advantages. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood," &c. **II. She is often deprived of earthly leaders.** "They shall smite the judge of Israel." *Hengstenberg* thinks this expression indicates a time when no king of the house of David reigned. Deplorable is the city with an enemy at the walls, and without a commander within to help. In early days the Church has been without leaders to teach and guide. Apostles were imprisoned and martyrs put to death. Men were determined to destroy the very existence of Christianity. Hence the great persecutions through which it has passed. But when the godly men cease and the faithful fail, then God will help (Ps. xii. 1). "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law-giver, the Lord is our king; he will save us." **III. She is roused to action.** "Now gather thyself in troops." 1. *Immediate action.* "Now." Every Christian, weak or strong, is commanded to arise and be ready. The present is the day for exertion, and those

who work should do it with vigour. 2. *United action.* "Gather thyself in troops." Dangers are great. United and personal action are required. Stragglers may be taken prisoners. Never let the enemies' watchword prevail—"Divide and conquer." Close thy ranks, and let each soldier keep his place. Supported by the promise and presence of God we should fear no evil and shun no duty. "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits."

THE RULER OF ISRAEL.—*Verses* 2, 3.

In the greatest danger and the deepest degradation of Zion a ruler shall arise to deliver her, and raise her to be a dreaded power in the world.

I. The place from which the ruler came. Bethlehem, the most insignificant, not Jerusalem, the royal, city, gave birth to Jesus. Little, in a worldly sense, it was not the least among the cities of Judah; but eclipsed them all in spiritual dignity. God perfects strength out of seeming weakness, and immortalizes obscure places by the events of his providence. Some men derive honours from, and others confer celebrity upon, the place in which they were born. Many cities have striven for the honour of Homer's birth. In Bethlehem we see the Divine purpose to choose "the base things of the world, and to bring to nought things that are." **II. The method in which the ruler came.** 1. He *was promised.* "Out of thee shall he come forth." Chief priests and scribes gave the right answer to Herod's questions (Matt. ii. 4—6). When it was rumoured that he would come out of Galilee, his enemies could say, "Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was." When we think that the promise has failed, God is arranging events, choosing agents, and fulfilling his word. 2. He was *appointed.* In the purpose of God he was set apart, and according to the command of God he came. He came not of himself, but the Father sent and sealed him (John vi. 27). "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me" (Ps. xl. 7, 8). 3. He was *born of a woman.* "She which travaileth hath brought forth." He was born of a woman; the virgin conceived and bore a son (Isa. vii. 14). His goings forth were of old, but his birth was in time. He was real God and true man. God was manifest in the flesh; and in the coming of the Messiah we may read the truth of God, and discern the purpose and presence of God. "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which has come to pass." **III. The purpose for which the ruler came.** "Who shall be ruler in Israel?" The circumstances of his birth and life seemed to bespeak anything rather than royal dominion. Pilate put the question, "Art thou a king, then?" The answer was, "I am a king. But my kingdom is not of this world." He had no temporal dominions, but he governs the hearts and lives of his people. He rules the nations of the earth, and will rule to the end of time. The judge of Israel was smitten, the empire of Cæsar came to nought, but the reign of Christ shall endure for ever. Napoleon rose with rapidity to boundless inheritance, but finished his course in disgraceful exile; contrasted empires founded on force with that of Jesus founded upon love, and exclaimed, "What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ, which is proclaimed, loved, and adored, and is extending over the whole earth!" **IV. The results which spring from the ruler's coming.** "Then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel." 1. *Deliverance from captivity.* They shall return from bondage to Canaan and to Jehovah. The remnant shall become genuine sons of Israel, people again in covenant with God. 2. *Restoration to unity.* Exiled Jews, Gentiles of heathen nations, shall be united as brethren under his reign, and incorporated into a spiritual commonwealth. Then men become Israelites not in name, but in spirit and truth. Grace makes all sons of God. The promise is not only to Israel after the flesh, but to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts ii. 39).

The Incarnation and Birth of Christ.

I. Who it was that sent Christ forth. "Out of thee shall he come forth to *me*." Jesus Christ did not come forth without his Father's permission, authority, and assistance. We are too apt to forget that while there are distinctions as to the persons in the Trinity, there are no distinctions of honour; and we frequently ascribe the honour of our salvation, or at least the depths of its mercy and the extremity of its benevolence, more to Jesus Christ than we do to the Father. Contemplate that *the Father* sent him, and in every period of his life think that he suffered what *the Father* willed; that every step of his life was marked with the approval of the great *I Am*. **II. Where did he come to at the time of his incarnation?** *First*, it seemed necessary that Christ should be born in Bethlehem, because of *Bethlehem's history*. Again, there is something *in the name of the place*. The word *Bethlehem* has a double meaning. It signifies "the house of bread," and "the house of war." Jesus is the bread of his people on which they feed. Here the bread of life was first given to man to eat. It is also called "the house of war," because Christ is to every man "the house of bread" or "the house of war." *Ephratah* signifies "fruitfulness" or "abundance." All our fruitfulness is from Christ. His incarnation fattens the soil of our hearts. Next, notice *the position of Bethlehem* "Little among the thousands of Judah." There are many little ones, unknown and dwelling in obscurity. Christ is always born among the little ones; lieth not in great hearts, but in little ones. A broken heart and a low spirit shall have the Saviour, and none else. Another thought, *how wonderfully mysterious was that providence which brought Jesus Christ's mother to Bethlehem at the very time when she was to be delivered*. **III. What did Jesus come for?** "To be ruler in Israel." He was "born the King of the Jews." Men are born princes, but seldom born kings. But he is not ruler of Israel after the flesh, but after the spirit. Hast thou submitted to the sway of Christ? **IV. Did Jesus ever come before?** "Whose goings forth have been ever of old." First, *Christ has had his goings forth in his Godhead*. "From everlasting." He has not been a secret and a silent person up to this moment. That new-born child is the infant of to-day, but the ancient of eternity. 1. Of old he went forth as our covenant-head in election. 2. He had goings forth for his people, as their representative before the throne, even before they were begotten in the world. Secondly, we believe that Christ has *come forth of old, even to men, so that men have beheld him*. He appeared to Abraham, to Jacob, to Joshua, and to the three youths in the fiery furnace. Observe that each of these four great occurrences happened to the saints, *when they were engaged in very eminent duty, or when they were about to be engaged in it*. When Abraham *interceded* for Sodom, Jacob engaged in *wrestling*, Joshua *exercising bravery*, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in high places of *persecution*. Christ hath not left going forth yet. Recollect he goes to Bethlehem. Are you little? He will go forth to meet you. He will come to your poor house,—wretched heart. Trust him, and he will go forth to abide with you for ever [*Spurgeon*].

The Shepherd King.—*Verse* 4.

The government of this ruler is further described under the similitude of a shepherd feeding and defending his flock, establishing and extending his kingdom in all the earth.

I. The work of the shepherd king. He shall "feed"—a word which indicates to feed by ruling, as in the Greek in Matt. ii. 6, "Out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule (*feed* marg.) my people Israel." 1. *He will feed his flock*. The soul is hungry, and men crave for food. The word of Christ can feed the soul, and satisfy the wants of humanity. Those who believe in him "shall not hunger nor thirst" any more. 2. *He will rule his flock*. He will

teach and guide, rule and provide. We require control as well as nourishment. All his sheep "follow him, for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." **II. The qualifications of the shepherd king.** Israel's princes had no power, but he shall stand, clad in the strength and displaying the glory of the Lord. 1. *He has Divine power.* "Rule in the strength of the Lord." He is invested with power to defend his flock against wolves and robbers (John x. 11, 12). Care would be in vain if the sheep could not be secured from danger. "No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." 2. *He has Divine tenderness.* His power is not tyrannical. He loves where he feeds. His might is used to protect, not to destroy the flock. He does not flee away like an hireling, but lays down his own life for the sheep. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." 3. *He has Divine majesty.* "In the majesty of the name of the Lord his God." All power in earth and heaven is given to him. Majesty is displayed in his love and teaching, in his nature and work. He is invested with more dignity than ordinary kings. He bears the name of God (Isa. ix. 5; x. 21); the spirit of might rests upon him (xi. 1); and in the greatness of his majesty he overthrows every enemy (Ex. xiv. 7). **III. The attitude of the shepherd king.** "He shall *stand* and feed." 1. He is *actively* engaged. To sit is the attitude of a judge, to stand is the position of one ready to succour and defend. He defended Israel from the attack of heathen nations. He will watch and feed his Church to the end of time. He is always present and vigilant. "Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither sleep nor slumber." 2. He is *constantly* engaged. He never sits down in ease and neglect. He stands fixed in purpose, and none can hinder or remove him. He endures, surveys, and guards his flock on every side. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged until he hath set judgment in the earth." **IV. The blessings which flow from the work of the shepherd king.** Through the care and providence of Christ his people shall be increased, established, and acquire greatness and dominion. 1. *The perpetual existence of the Church.* "And they shall abide." His people shall not wander to and fro, as hitherto. They shall rest and abide in permanent security and peace. None can hurt or destroy them. Because he lives they shall live. The original promise, often forfeited through disobedience, shall be fulfilled: "Ye shall dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid" (Lev. xxvi. 6: Isa. xiv. 30). 2. *The increasing greatness of the Church.* "For now shall he be great." A "little flock" only follow him now, but this flock shall be great in numbers and influence. Its king shall become famous, precious, and attractive to others. "I have made thee a great name, like the name of the great that are in the earth." 3. *The universal dominion of the Church.* "He shall be great unto the ends of the earth." There shall be no end to the increase, no limit to the power of his empire. Souls shall be converted, nations brought under the yoke of Christ, thus the greatness of his love and grace shall be set forth to the very ends of the world. "I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

ver. 1. 1. Christ's ordinary harbingers and forerunners, when he is to come with mercies to his Church, are afflictions to fit them for such manifestations. 2. These afflictions are often very grievous. The contempt and injury done to authority and magistrates, under whom a people may be kept from confusion and the Church protected, is a special ingredient in the affliction of the visible Church. See *Hutcheson*. To be smitten on the face betokens shame; to smite *with a rod* betokens destruction. Now both shall meet in

one; as in the Great Day, the wicked shall awake to shame and everlasting contempt, and shall perish for ever [*Pusey*].

Ver. 2. *Bethlehem.* God orders all in the continuous course of his wisdom. All lies in perfect harmony in the Divine mind. Each event is the sequel of what went before. So here the prophet joins on, what to us stands in such contrast with that simple *and*. Yet he describes the two conditions as bearing one another. He had said that the *judge* was smitten, and that Israel had no *counsellor* nor *king;* now he speaks of the Ruler in Israel. He had said that the rule was to *come to the tower of the flock;* now, retaining the word, he speaks of the ruler in whom it was to be established. But he has greater things to say, so he pauses—*And thou!* People have admired the brief appeal of the murdered Cæsar, "Thou too, Brutus." The like energetic conciseness lies in the words, *And thou! Bethlehem Ephratah* [*Pusey*].

Goings forth. 1. In the purposes of eternity. 2. In the creation of the world. 3. In the manifestations of Old Testament. 4. In human birth. 5. In the events of providence.

Ver. 4. The shepherd character of Jesus indicates:—1. The helpless and lost condition of man. 2. The love of God in assuming the character and office of a shepherd. 3. The benevolent design in redeeming mankind.

Feed. This expression shows how Christ stands towards his own, the sheep that have been intrusted to him. He does not rule over them like a dreadful tyrant, who oppresses his subjects with fear, but he is a shepherd, and cares for his sheep with all the gentleness that can be desired. But since we are surrounded with enemies, the prophet adds: He works with power; that is, with all the power there is in God, all the protection there is in Christ, as soon as there is need to protect the Church. We should learn, therefore, to expect from Christ just as much salvation as there is power in God [*Calvin*]. But neither *feed* nor *rule* conveys the full idea of the original expression (Matt. ii. 6). The full idea is, *who shall act the part of a shepherd to my people Israel,*—who shall at once *protect*, and *guide*, and *feed*, and *govern* or *rule* them [*Morrison*].

> "As the good shepherd tends his fleecy care,
> Seeks freshest pasture and the purest air,
> Explores the lost, the wandering sheep directs,
> By day o'ersees them, and by night protects;
> The tender lambs he raises in his arms,
> Feeds from his hand, and in his bosom warms;
> Thus shall mankind his guardian care engage,
> The promised Father of the future age."
> [*Pope.*]

The world hates the Church, and feasts its eyes upon its misery.

HOMILETICS.

The Peaceful Rule of Christ.—*Verses* 5, 6.

This one just mentioned will bring peace within his kingdom, and bestow means sufficient to secure it when given. Literally and spiritually this promise belongs to the whole Church, and indicates the peaceful reign of Christ over men. **I. He will give peace to His people.** Peace to the individual and to the Church is the gift of God. 1. *Peace in his own person.* "This man shall be the peace." The soul is dissatisfied and restless; filled with fear, anxiety, and a sense of guilt. The inner life of men is a prayer for peace. Everything points to God as the only sufficient satisfaction. Christ reconciles to God, gives peace with God, and peace with conscience. He is "the Prince of peace, and sends peace on earth" where all is strife. He "came and preached peace to you who were far off, and to them that were nigh." 2. *Peace by his own agencies.* "Then shall he raise up seven shepherds," &c. Whatever number this may signify, the soldiers of Christ in themselves are weaker than the armies of the world. But the feeblest become heroes in Christ to conquer the enemy and secure the Church. Valiant achievements have been made by the shepherds and princes of the Church. God requires

not numbers nor prowess. His instrumentalities are feeble and more than enough. Grace is stronger than sin. God is mightier than man. The weapons of our warfare are "not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." II. He will defend the peace which He has given to His people. The Church is in danger, the peace of the Christian is often disturbed, and "in the world ye shall have tribulation." But this man gives and secures peace to the individual, the Church, and the country. 1. *He delivers from the enemy.* "Asshur is a type of the nations of the world by which the people of the Lord are attacked, because in the time of the prophet this power was the imperial power by which Israel was endangered." Nimrod was the founder of the empire, Gen. x. 9, and indicates the hostility of this power. Notice—(1) *The imminent danger.* The enemy treads within *the borders*—prevails in *the land*, and enters their *palaces*. Sennacherib's army entered Judah, took defenced cities, and besieged Jerusalem itself, Is. xxxvi. 1; xxxvii. 3. (2) *The complete deliverance.* Asshur was driven back, confined, and wasted in his own territory with the sword. He was defeated and crushed at his own gates. 2. *He defends from the enemy.* When defeated once the attack is often renewed. But the Church will carry the battle into the dominions of sin and Satan. Those who try to waste her shall be foiled and wasted themselves. "Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field."

Our Peace in Trouble.—*Verse 5.*

The Messiah is here intended. The word *man*, in Italics, is not in the original. The translators should rather have put in the word Ruler or Shepherd. But if *he, himself* be understood, it is all the same, whatever be the supplement. The *Assyrian* is used metaphorically, for some enemy. It is common for sacred writers to express any significant adversary by the name of Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon; for these powers distinguished themselves by their hatred, oppression, and enslaving of the Jews. We may include everything that annoys and alarms, that would injure and destroy. Be the case what it may, he is our relief. He does not exempt us from conflict, but affords help, comfort, and deliverance. Enemies assail, but he keeps our minds stayed upon him in perfect peace. Let us think of several Assyrians, and see how he is our peace, when they invade and would swallow us up. Does *the broken law* of God threaten us? A man has nothing to fear from the law when perfectly kept. The curse enters through every breach of transgression. Who is not therefore exposed? The commandment coming—sin reviving—hope dying—and nothing expected but a certain fearful looking for of judgment! But he is our peace, who died for our sins and rose again for our justification. Does our *adversary the Devil* terrify? When you think of his wiles and strength, and consider yourself, you are filled with despair. You are no more than a worm to a mountain. The promise is, "Fear not, thou *worm* Jacob; for thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small as dust." In the Lord you have righteousness and strength. In all these things you are more than conquerors, through him that loved you. Do we complain of *the sin that dwelleth in us?* A Christian must feel and ought to feel it, and be deeply humbled. "O wretched man that I am!" &c. But where does he find relief? "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." He has begun and will finish the good work in me. My sanctification *will* be as complete as my justification now is. He is not only able to keep me from falling, but to present me faultless. Do we consider *the troubles of life?* In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." Modern Christians may not be called to suffer persecution as the disciples did; but they may be subjects of the same personal and relative trials, which require the same support and solace: they equally belong to him, and are never

dearer to his heart than in the hour of affliction. He will not leave them comfortless. But *death!* Death is called the king of terrors. Where would be the triumph of faith if we did not feel its approach? But it is possible to rise above this enemy. We know it from Scripture and observation. Whence comes the victory? There is only one relief when this Assyrian comes—to see Him that has "abolished death." The enemy is not only disarmed by him but turned into a friend—the curse converted into a blessing. To die is gain. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," &c. From *Jay*.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 5. *This Man.* Christ is our peace, because through him we have peace *above* us with God, *within* us in our conscience, *around* us with other men, and *under* us with Satan [*Lange*].

Ver. 6. *Seven shepherds.* Feeble instrumentality. Contrasted with the powers of evil. Its work. Its strength. Its exploits. In the Church of God the work of pastoral teaching is always a work of warfare against error. In the escutcheon of the Church the sword is joined with the crook. Cf. Ps. cxlix. 6—9 [*Wordsworth*]. The more widely the Gospel spreads itself among the nations of the world, the more bitter will be the spirit of unbelief and ungodliness [*Keil*].

Princes of men. Victorious army of believers and preachers [*Wordsworth*].

Shall waste. Note, says one, those that threaten ruin to the Church of God hasten ruin to themselves; and their destruction is the Church's salvation.

HOMILETICS.

Israel as the Dew.—*Verse* 7.

The remnant of Jacob through participation in the Messiah's work shall have a beneficent power, and spiritually influence surrounding nations, as rain and dew revive withering grass.

I. The Divine origin of dew. "As a dew from the Lord." Israel's restoration and increase here entirely from the Lord. This "orient pearl" glistens with Divine light. It is one of "the precious things of heaven" (Deut. xxxiii. 13). Everything that quickens and invigorates spiritual life, every influence that preserves it from corruption and decay, comes from God. "I will be as the dew unto Israel." II. The sovereign laws of dew. "That tarrieth not for man," &c. It is independent of the contrivance of man. It does not originate by human caprice and calculation. Man with all his science and skill can neither make nor hinder it. God supplies it according to his own purpose and law. "Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew?" III. The blessed influence of dew. Distilled in the silent night by the influences of heaven and earth, it bathes and refreshes each blade and flower with stainless moisture, and becomes an image of choicest blessing. 1. It is *quickening* in its influence. Without rain a Christian or an ungodly community is like grass dry and withered in appearance. "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field." 2. It is *gentle* in its influence. The word *showers* implies multitude of drops. "Drops as the gentle dew from heaven." Imagine sheets of water falling at once. What destruction to life and vegetation! God breaks the force by its distribution in the needed showers, and each shower into countless drops. Not even the tenderest plant is injured. It descends noiselessly and penetrates deeply. Herbs grow and flourish under the soft influence which waiteth not for the sons of men. "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." 3. It is *copious* in its influence. "As the showers." Multitude of drops in falling rain we call a shower. Showers are dispersed in drops over the

face of the earth. "God hath divided a watercourse for the overflowings of water" (Job xxxviii. 35). Pentecost and times of revivals illustrate this. Thus the influence of the Church upon the world should be like the effects of rain upon dry fields and withering plants. It should quicken and strengthen, make fruitful and fragrant. The godly should mitigate God's anger which burns up the ungodly; draw blessings from heaven in personal and social life; and be as the dew "in the midst of many people."

"Now sliding streams their thirsty plants renew,
And feed their fibres with reviving dew" [*Pope*].

ISRAEL AS A LION.—*Verses* 8, 9.

God and his people have not only a *benignant* but a *terrible* aspect towards men,—as dew to the well-disposed, and as a lion to the assailants. In many respects the Church may be like the lion.

I. In that religious awe which they exercise over the minds of ungodly men. The lion among beasts of the forest and the young lion among flocks of sheep are feared beyond description. The good examples and consistent lives of pious men often strike terror into the conscience, and check the evil practices of the wicked. They are awed by them and dare not harm them. Herod feared John because he was a holy man (Mark vi. 20). **II. In the courage with which they attack antagonists.** "If he go through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces." It boldly faces and braves the force of arms. Wounds rather provoke than repress its fierceness. It is not daunted by numbers; will often attack an entire caravan, and if overpowered in the combat, instead of flying, will gradually retreat with its face to the enemy until it dies. Luther and Latimer were the lions of the Church. Christians now through God are Cœur-de-lions, and endued with invincible power. "Terrible as an army with banners." **III. In the victory which they gain over the enemy.** "Lifted up upon thine adversaries." 1. The victory is *resistless*. "None can deliver," however strong and determined. 2. The victory is *complete*. "All thine enemies shall be cut off." Ceasing to be enemies or destroyed in their opposition. The victories of the Maccabees were earnests of future glories. The hand of the Church shall be strengthened by the might of Jehovah. All adversaries will shortly be bruised under her feet. "And he went forth conquering and to conquer."

EXTERMINATION OF WAR AND IDOLATRY.—*Verses* 10—15.

Jehovah will secure the peace of his people by the destruction of war instruments, the extermination of idolatry, and the infliction of judgment upon resisting nations. Appliances of war will not be required in universal peace and security.

I. War abolished. God will deprive them of everything to make war, that they may depend upon him alone. 1. *Human aids will be taken away.* Men multiply horses and chariots, and trust in them (Ps. xx. 7). Israel was accustomed to rely on Egypt and Assyria (cf. Is. xxxi. 1—3; Hos. xiv. 3), but the time will come when the Church of God will not lean on an arm of flesh. 2. *Outward defences will be destroyed.* Strongholds and fortified cities will be demolished. "And throw down all thy strongholds." God will teach his people not to look to war-chariots and secular allies, not to seek refuge in temporal support. He will be their garrison and deliverer. Cities have been provisioned and besieged for years and yet have fallen: but God defends his people, "all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates." **II. Idolatry destroyed.** In the Church of God there may be illicit intercourse with idols. When men are impatient in affliction, restless in their mind, and curious to know the future, they set up gods and groves of their own. 1. *Systems of divination will be destroyed.* Witchcraft, conjuring, and fortune-telling will be cut off. The work of men's hands shall not be worshipped. Necromancy, pyromancy, and astrology are diabolical

arts. Such tricks are abomination to God, who will judge them in his wrath. 2. *Idolatrous worship destroyed.* Graven images will be demolished. Groves and plantations will be plucked up, and not a remnant of idolatry left behind. God will *cut off* whatever hinders his purpose and corrupts his people. Confidence in creatures is idolatry. Holiness before God is essential to victory over the foe. Every curious art and devilish practice is destined to fall before the preaching of the cross (Acts xix. 19).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 10—14. *The purification of the Church.* Everything of an ungodly and idolatrous nature must be taken away before it can conquer the world and be fit for God's residence. This is, 1. A necessary work. 2. A painful work. 3. A Divine work. "The greater the glory and purity of the Church, the less it needs or hangs upon human aid. The more it is reft of human aid, the more it hangs upon God. So God promises, as a blessing, that he will remove from her all mere human resources, both what was in itself evil and what, although good, had been abused" [*Pusey*].

Ver. 15. *The doom of heathen nations and ungodly opponents.* 1. Vengeance without mercy. 2. Vengeance unprecedented. "Such as they have not heard." "In like way, the woe on those who obey not the truth, also looks on to the end. It too is final. There is nothing to soften it. Punishments in the course of life are medicinal. Here no mention is made of mercy, but only of *executing vengeance;* and that with *wrath and fury;* and that such as they *have not heard.* For as eye hath not seen, nor heart conceived, the good things laid up in store for those who love God, so neither the evil things prepared for those who in act show that they hate him" [*Pusey*].

The Prince of peace. 1. *His coming.* (*a*) In lowly guise, ver. 1; humble. (*b*) And yet to the throne, ver. 1; glorious. (*c*) Because he was appointed to this form of old; eternal. (*d*) At the appointed fulness of time, ver. 2; temporal.

2. *His work.* (*a*) To seek and save that which was lost, ver. 2. (*b*) To be a shepherd in truth, ver. 3. (*c*) To prepare God's kingdom even to the ends of the world, ver. 3. (*d*) To give peace to his followers through the protection which he will afford and the bestowment of power, ver. 4. (*e*) To judge the world, vers. 5, 14.

3. *His congregation.* (*a*) A spiritual congregation, ver. 6. (*b*) A powerful congregation, vers. 7, 8. (*c*) A holy congregation: (1) trusts in God alone, vers. 9, 10; (2) inquires after God's will alone, ver. 11; (3) fears God alone, vers. 12, 13 [*Lange*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER V.

Ver. 2. *Bethlehem.* By a remarkable interposition of providence, interwoven, however, with the course of events in the world, was it brought about that the promised King should be born in Bethlehem (as Micah the prophet had foretold), the very place where the house of David had its origin; while, at the same time, the lowly circumstances of his birth were in striking contrast with the inherent dignity and glory that were veiled in the new-born child [*Neander*]. Both names were derived from "fruitfulness," "House of Bread" and "fruitfulness;" and despite of centuries of Mohammedan oppression, it is fertile still. It had been rich in the fruitfulness of this world; rich, thrice rich, should it be in spiritual fruitfulness [*Pusey*].

Ver. 3. *Give them up.* (1) Into the hands of their enemies. Indeed the far greater part never returned from the captivity, but remained, although willingly, in the enemy's land, outwardly shut out from the land of the promise and the hope of their fathers. But (2) all were, more than before, *given up* to

follow their own ways. God was less visibly present among them. Prophecy ceased soon after the return from captivity, and many tokens of the nearness of God and means of his communications with them,—the Ark and the Urim and Thummim,—were gone. It was a time of pause and waiting, wherein the fulness of God's gifts was withdrawn, that they might look on to Him who was to come. *Until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth, i. e.* until the Virgin should conceive and bear a Son [*Pusey*].

Vers. 5, 6. *Peace.* How like a paradise the world would be, flourishing in joy and rest, if men would cheerfully conspire in affection, and hopefully contribute to each other's content. Holy Scripture itself in that one term of "peace" most usually comprehends all joy and contents, all felicity and prosperity; so that the heavenly consort of angels, when they agree most highly to bless and to wish the greatest happiness to mankind, could not better express their sense than by saying, "Be on earth peace, and good-will among men" [*I. Barrow*].

"Peace hath her victories
Not less renowned than war."—[*Milton.*]

Ver. 7. *Dew* comes down from heaven, is of heavenly, not earthly, origin, transparent, glistening with light, reflecting the hues of heaven; gentle, slight, weak in itself, refreshing, cooling the strong heats of the day; consumed itself, yet thereby preserving life; falling on the dry and withered grass, wherein all nature droops, and recalling it to freshness of life. And still more in those lands, where from the beginning of April to the end of October, the close of the latter and the beginning of the early rain, during all the hot months of summer, the life of all herbage depends upon the dew alone [*Pusey*].

Vers. 8, 9. The *lion* was the emblem of strength and sovereignty (The Lion of England). Illustrative of Israel (Num. xxiv. 9), and Judah (Gen. xlix. 9); the courage of brave men (2 Sam. i. 23; xxiii. 20), and the boldness of saints (Prov. xxviii. 1). The lion is fearless of men (Is. xxxi. 4; Nah. ii. 11). What can a javelin do against his strength! But even the king of the forest can read the eye and the language of man. *Moral* force is greater than *physical* force. What then must be the strength of the Christian Church under the leadership of "The Lion of the tribe of Judah"!

Vers. 10—15. Christianity is by its nature adapted to effect these and similar changes in the physical, intellectual, and social state of our world, and by the decree of the Eternal it is hastening their accomplishment. It came into the world not only to reinstate man in his proper relationship to God, but to restore to him the forfeited inheritance of earth. It has already done much. Europe has been indebted to it for most of its civilization. England owes to it most of its elements of happiness and security. Within our own time it has achieved much good in the enfranchisement of the slave, in the partial civilization of Polynesia, in a thousand instrumentalities of blessing that are now at work in almost every quarter of the globe. It shall go on until it has attained all its happy and benign results. It shall yet enter, penetrate, and suffuse the entire frame of mind and existence. The Church shall become an eternal excellence, and a joy of many generations. The field of the world shall present the aspect as of a paradise regained. The race of man shall appear as the ransomed of the Lord, joy and gladness on their heads, sorrow and sighing for ever fled away [*Legge*].

"O scenes surpassing fable and yet true,
Scenes of accomplished bliss, which who can see,
Though but in distant prospect, and not feel
The soul refreshed with foretaste of the joy,—
The joy of an assembly such as earth
Saw never; such as heaven stoops down to see!'
[*Cowper.*]

CHAPTER VI.

Critical Notes.] The *third* division now begins, after declaration of judgment and salvation which awaits the future remnant. **Hear**] Plead with God in controversy. **Mts.**] Witness and murmur with the echo (Deut. xxxii. 1: Is. i. 2). **Contend**] in strife or quarrel (Judg. viii. 1: Is. l. 8. 2. **His**] Emphatic intentionally to indicate Jehovah's right to contend, and to sharpen their conscience by pointing to their calling [*Keil*]. 3. **What**] opens the suit. Israel, tired with the dealings of God, had backslided from him. **Wearied**] By demanding what is irksome (Is. xliii. 23: 1 John v. 3); or failing to perform what is promised (Jer. ii. 31). 4. **For**] God had done good only, deliverance from Egypt and guidance by Moses the chief proofs of it. 5. **Now**] A very tender word, like our "*do* now remember," or "*do* remember," beseeching instead of commanding [*Pusey*]. The special period mentioned and the wonderful acts performed in it display the justice, mercy, and righteousness of God (Judg. v. 11: Ps. xxiv. 5). 6.] Remembrance calls ingratitude to mind, and leads to inquiries. **Come**] (Deut. xxiii. 5.) God enthroned on high (Is. lvii. 15: Ps. cxv. 3. **Burnt**] Prescribed Lev. i. **Calves**] Thought to be most important (Lev. ix. 2, 3). 7.] "In case of calves value is heightened by quality, in rams by quantity" [*Keil*]. Climax culminates in *first-born*. But this only, of external, heathen origin, atones for sin by sin. 8.] God has *showed* them in the moral law that he *requires;* not outward sacrifices of any kind; but the fulfilment of moral obligations in three ways—do justly, love mercy (which are the sum of the second table), and walk humbly, *i. e.* as a holy nation should, in fellowship with God (cf. Deut. viii. 14; x. 12: 1 Sam. xv. 22). 9.] Israel lacks these virtues. **Crieth**] Earnestly and loudly in Jerusalem. **Wisdom**] Wise men will hear and discover God's authority in the message. "Thy name sees wisdom, *i. e.*, has the true wisdom of life in sight" [*Keil*]. Thy name looks out, the holy manifestation of thyself in judgment (Is. xxx. 27: cf. Ps. xiv. 2) [*Lange*]. **Rod**] Judgment threatened (Is. ix. 13). 10. **Yet**] notwithstanding warnings, treasures acquired by fraud and oppression. **Scant**] Lit. lean ephah, the measure forbidden (too small), not the right measure (Deut. xxv. 15, 16: Lev. xix. 36). **Abom.**] Smitten by God (Prov. xxii. 14); cursed (Num. xxiii. 7: Prov. xxiv. 24). 11. **Pure**] Men dream that they can be clean by sacrifices to God, in spite of daily sins. The prophet destroys this hope, reproves the rich for violence and the people for deceit. **Bag**] In which money and weights were carried (Deut. xxv. 13: Prov. xvi. 11). 13. **Sick**] *i. e.* I smite thee mortally (cf. for expression, Nah. iii. 19; for matter, Mic. i. 9). 14. **Satis.**] Fulfilment of Lev. xxvi. 26. Food would not be enough, nor sustain. **Midst**] Cast down in borders and in the metropolis, people will flee into the fortress, but only to die, not to be delivered. What goods and families are carried away will be given to the *sword* (cf. Jer. l. 37; xlii. 16). 15. **Reap**] The enemy will reap the harvests and plunder the stores (Lev. xxvi. 16: Deut. xxviii. 38—40). 16.] This punishment brought upon themselves. **Omri**] The conspirator and regicide (1 Kings xvi. 16—28). **Statutes**] By which this abandoned dynasty had disgraced the throne of Israel; human ordinances, not God's commands (Lev. xx. 23). **Bear**] "The present generation is ripe for the curse, which the Lord had cast forth in the law for the future of his people" (Is. lxv. 7) [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

A Listless People Rebuked.—*Verses* 1, 2.

These words are an introduction to what follows, an expostulation to an ungrateful people. God wishes them to see their guilt, and hear his voice in the controversy. A sinful people are obstinate and listless. But they must be roused and reproved:

I. By the voice of God. "Hear ye now what the Lord saith." God speaks to us and reasons with us in his word. He pleads with his people in condescension and grace, requires them to justify, if possible, their cause, and seeks to prove the equity of his dealings. "Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified." **II. By the earnestness of the Prophet.** The Prophet was reluctant to herald woe to his people, but the command was urgent. *Arise.* 1. He was earnest in *his tone.* "O my people," ver. 3. Bedewed with the spirit of his message. 2. He was earnest in *his attitude.* Arise, *stand up* as one having authority to rebuke, ready and undaunted before men. He must rouse himself that he may rouse his hearers. A cold frosty heart can never touch and kindle others into a flame. 3. He was earnest in *his method.* "Let the hills hear thy voice"—any way to stir up a careless people.

III. By the stability of creation. "Hear, O ye mountains." Mountains remain steadfast and hills are not carried from their place. The earth changes in its surface and its inhabitants pass away, but rocks endure for ever. Yet Nature is subject to its Creator and trembles at his voice, but men are stupefied and hardened by sin. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me."

THE CONTROVERSY BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.—*Verse* 2.

I. Man's complaints against God. He complains, 1. Of a corrupt nature; 2. Of the power of temptation; 3. Of the dealings of Providence. **II. God's complaints against man.** 1. Mercies despised. 2. Grace refused. 3. Calls neglected. **4. Judgments sent in vain** [*F. Wagstaff*].

WEARINESS IN GOD'S SERVICE UNJUSTIFIABLE.—*Verses* 3—5.

Many, like Israel, are weary in the service of God, complain of their lot, and seek to return to the world. God pleads with such, proves that their conduct is unjustifiable. No wrong has been done to them; on the other hand, they have sinned against God. "Wherein have I wearied thee?"

I. God's claims upon men are just. "O my people." Israel were God's people by covenant relationship. God chose them and they promised to serve him. All men are God's by creation and providence. They are raised to this rank and gifted in their mind by him. Hence God has a just claim upon their homage and life. To refuse is ingratitude and insult. **II. God's commands are reasonable.** God does not demand what is impossible or unreasonable. He does not, like an Eastern tyrant, compel men to serve him with rigour and hardships. God might weary them by unlawful requirements (Is. xliii. 23); or unfulfilled promises (Jer. ii. 31); but they weary him with their iniquities (Is. xliii. 24). "His commands are not grievous," why then complain or get wearied? "What iniquity have your fathers found in me?" **III. God's kindness is remarkable.** "I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt," &c. Israel were specially blessed. 1. They were *redeemed from bondage.* "And redeemed thee out of the house of servants." Instead of a nation of slaves they were priests to God. 2. They *were guided* in the wilderness. "I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." They had instruction, intercession, and praise. 3. They *were defended* in their progress. The power of Balak and the device of Balaam were frustrated, and the curse was turned into a blessing. From Shittim to Gilgal their progress was safe and triumphant. God could have done no more for them, yet they "forgot God their Saviour, who had done great things in Egypt; wondrous things in the land of Ham." In the review of our life we see goodness and mercy, and abundant reason for gratitude. In deliverance from trouble and the destruction of the enemy, we may read the fulfilment of the promise and the display of the righteousness of God. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

MAN'S QUESTIONS AND GOD'S ANSWERS.—*Verses* 6—8.

Come before God not merely with respect, like bowing to a superior—but come with acceptance, in honour and duty (Deut. xxiii. 5: Ps. cv. 2). In whatever spirit these words were uttered, they indicate the importance and necessity of coming to God. They are the recurring question, pressing upon all ages and all individuals—"How shall man be just with God?" They set forth God's answer to the question and specify the way of acceptance before him.

I. Man's questions. "Wherewith shall I come," &c. Convicted by the previous appeal the people inquire how Jehovah may be appeased. 1. *By external forms?* "With burnt offerings—with calves of a year old?" Men naturally cling first to

outward forms, trust to customary rites to heal the schism of the soul. They are liberal in their offerings, zealous in their profession, and ready to sacrifice anything for peace of conscience. But the blood of bulls and of goats cannot take away sin. 2. *By human sacrifices?* "Shall I give my firstborn?" Nations have "burnt their children in the fire" (2 Kings xvii. 31). They have been driven to desperation in their sin and superstitions, and sought to please God by inventions of their own. Jewish rites and heathen sacrifices were alike in vain. No spotless beast nor human blood could quench the fire of the soul. "There was wanting," says Porphyry, "some universal method of delivering men's souls, which no sect of philosophy had ever yet found out." **II. God's answer to man's questions.** God has revealed his will to man and showed what is required from him. 1. *It is revealed in the written word of God.* "He hath *showed* thee, O man." In the Scriptures we have an answer to the questions of the soul and the problems of life. Without the Bible man is in the dark. The world by wisdom knew not God. The light of nature is insufficient, and the doings of providence say, It is not in me. We have no need to guess nor grope the way, "the word is nigh unto thee." 2. *It is declared by the servants of God.* The prophet plainly declares what God requires. Nothing ceremonial, nothing impracticable. Three things are specially mentioned. (1) *To do justly.* Not mere profession, but practice. Justice to God and integrity to man in all our dealings. God's religion destroys injustice and oppression. We must do injury to none, but right to all. Render to all their due. (2) *To love mercy.* We must not only be just, but kind to all. Our mercy, like God's, must be allied with equity. We must not merely show mercy but *love* and delight in mercy. Mercy gives more than justice demands. The hard exacting man is not a child of God. "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." (3) *To walk humbly with God.* To walk with God implies reconciliation, faith, and constant intercourse (Gen. xvii. 1: Heb. xi. 5). This is the essence of religion and the whole duty of man (Eccl. xii. 13). This is what God requires from us. The heart, not outward forms; sincerity and truth, not fair profession. "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul?"

Is it not True.—*Verses* 6—8.

Our knowledge of good and evil comes from God. Conscience uninstructed by him is useless. Some things which only seem to be good are sought after most diligently by men who are strictly conscientious. Other things good in themselves, which seem undesirable, are eschewed by the same persons. Human conscience is a depraved conscience. In the text we read the doctrine that God has showed to man that which is both acceptable to himself and profitable to us.

I. The revelation. He hath showed. 1. "*What he has revealed.* Himself as the chief good. His attributes a subject for praise. His service delightful employment. His favour of infinite value. 2. *How he has revealed* these things. (1) By nature. Here he faintly exhibits somewhat of himself. (2) By history, especially inspired history. (3) By Jesus Christ. Whatever nature or history has taught, by Jesus is amplified and confirmed. By him we behold the Father's loving-kindness, tender mercy, forbearing grace. (4) By our own experience. We are convinced of the blessedness of holiness, of justice, of a humble walk with God; indeed of everything the Lord has declared is good. **II. The requisition.** God does not show us what is good merely to enlarge our knowledge, but to insure our service. Every good thing if rightly used redounds to his glory. 1. *He requires us to demonstrate our knowledge.* The light must not be put under a bushel. The man who hid his Lord's money was condemned. 2. *He requires us to display this in a particular way.* (1) To do justly. It is not enough to speak fairly. Unpractical religion is unscriptural religion. (2) To love mercy.

It is not enough to do merely from a sense of duty. We must delight in the things of God. (3) To walk humbly with thy God. Nor does God require deeds of justice and love of mercy, without dispensing that grace without which these things can exist. In order to do justly we are invited to walk with God, deserving his justice, receiving his mercy. As a little child, observe the Father's practice, and as far as you can do like him [*Stems and Twigs*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 4, 5. *Remember*, &c. I. God's dealings with his people attest—1. His love; 2. His faithfulness; and 3. His power. II. These dealings are often forgotten. This displays, 1. Thoughtlessness, and 2. Ingratitude. "Micah speaks by a rare idiom of the *righteousnesses* of the Lord, each act of mercy being a separate effluence of his righteousness. The very names of the places suggest the righteous acts of God, the unrighteous of Israel" [*Pusey*].

Ver. 8. *Showed good.* 1. The thing desired. *Good.* "Who will show us any good?" Righteousness, love, justice, and humility. II. The method of getting it. God reveals it, hath *showed* thee. It is not a discovery of man, &c. "*Do justly. To do judgment* are, chiefly, all acts of equity; *to love mercy*, all deeds of love. *Judgment* is what right requires; *mercy*, what love. Yet, secondarily, to do judgment is to pass righteous judgment in all cases; and so, as to others, judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment; and as to one's self also. Judge equitably and kindly of others, humbly of thyself. He addeth, *love mercy;* being merciful out of love, not of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver (2 Cor. ix. 7). These acts contain the whole duty of man, corresponding with and formed upon the mercy and justice of God (Ps. ci. 1; lxi. 7). All which is due, any how, or in any way, is of *judgment;* all which is free toward man, although not free toward God, is of *mercy.* There remains, *walk humbly with thy God;* not *bow* thyself only before him, as they had offered (ver. 6); nor, again, *walk* with him only, as did Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Job; but *walk humbly* (lit. *bow down the going*). Yet still with thy God; never lifting up thyself, never sleeping, never standing still, but ever walking on, yet ever *casting thyself down;* and the more thou goest on in grace, the more cast thyself down, as our Lord saith, Luke xvii. 10" [*Pusey*].

A good man, like a good angel, is ever in God's presence, and must therefore walk worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called (Eph. iv. 1, 2), with all modesty of demeanour, especially when he draweth nigh to God in holy exercises. Then it must be his care to exercise three-fold humility First *precedent:* before he sets upon God's service, he must in heart devote and dedicate all that he is and hath as a due debt to the Almighty, saying with David, It is of thine own, Lord (1 Chron. xxix. 14). The second is *concomitant;* when in the performance of good duties he hath grace (this lovely grace of humility especially), "whereby he may serve God acceptably" (Heb. xii. 28); which is an awful respect to the Divine Majesty with whom we have to do (Heb. iv. 13). The third is *subsequent;* when having done his best he is dejected with a sense of his failings, and looking on his plumes he is abashed before God. As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God (*Trapp*).

Walk humbly. 1. In *prosperity;* for God is our benefactor. Everything comes from him. 2. In *adversity;* for he corrects in wisdom and truth. 3. In all *circumstances* of life; for he disposes our lot. We are dependent creatures. Our times are in his hands. *Wait* upon God. He will renew your strength and guide your life.

> To doubt thy goodness would be base
> Ingratitude in me:
> Past favours shall renew my hopes,
> And fix my faith in thee.

HOMILETICS.

THE VOICE OF GOD IN THE DISPENSATIONS OF HIS PROVIDENCE.—*Verse* 9.

These words refer to the solemn warnings given to Israel by the ministry of the prophets, and to the judgments about to fall upon Samaria and Jerusalem, because of their sins.

First. In what way may it be said that "the Lord's voice crieth" unto cities and nations. God has spoken by the prophets (Heb. i. 1); by his Son and by his Spirit in Apostles and teachers. In an *indirect* way the voice of God is heard in his works (Rom. i. 20; Ps. xix. 12; Acts xiv. 17). But especially in *providential dispensations*, of mercy or judgment, in events of an *afflictive* nature. He speaks to cities and nations when he exposes them to *war* and their young men fall by the sword—when the fruits of the earth are blasted or rot in the ground—when *famine* succeeds and thousands pine away with hunger. In *pestilence*, in dreaded *cholera*, the voice of God is distinctly heard. *Secondly.* Mark the *impression* which the voice of God produces upon different classes of individuals. Some boldly deny that he has ever spoken to men, except perhaps by the voice of natural conscience, and treat the doctrine of providence as superstitious (2 Pet. iii. 3, 4). Others are insensible to what is passing around them (Is. xxvi. 11). Others brave the threatenings of the Almighty, as if secure against all attacks (Is. v. 19; xxviii. 15). On *some* only a temporary impression is made: it alarms but fails to convert (Is. xxvi. 16). Others lay claim to superior wisdom, think in the discovery of the *proximate* or *second* causes of calamity that they have solved the mystery, and exclude the great First Cause that moves and regulates the whole. "The man of wisdom," the enlightened and consistent believer, "hears a voice they cannot hear, and sees a hand they cannot see." *Thirdly.* Notice the proper *improvement* to be made of such afflictive dispensations. "Hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it." View it not merely as a national calamity, but as a chastisement from the hand of God. While others treat it with mute surprise or affected indifference, and refuse to acknowledge a Divine hand in it, beware of such a pernicious course. Let us search and try our ways and turn to the Lord. Deep humiliation and sincere repentance should be accompanied with proofs of active and self-denying works (Is. lviii. 6—8), in nations and individuals [*Scottish Cong. Mag.* 1847].

"THE MEN OF WISDOM."—*Verse* 9.

Wise men are here contrasted with ignorant, careless, and wicked men. Wisdom here signifies *essence*, and the men of wisdom are the men of essence, not men of emptiness and folly. They hear the voice of the rod and understand the purpose for which it is sent.

I. Wise men discern the providence of God in the calamities of life. "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city." 1. *The rod of God speaks to men.* It has a voice and cries aloud. Scourges and calamities speak of the neglect and sins of men. They are the voice of God speaking in power and authority. Awful judgments and visitations are a *rod* to check and chastise for sin, to prevent folly and further misery. Yet many see but hear them not. God speaks once, yea twice, yet men perceive it not (Job xxxiii. 14). 2. *The rod of God is appointed for men.* "Who hath appointed it." Hume in his English History ascribes famines and desolating events, to the ignorance of the people, the rude methods of agriculture practised by our forefathers, and affirms that the progress of science and art will prevent calamities eventually. Men ascribe them to chance or to second causes, and ridicule the idea of Divine appointment. But these men recognize Divine purpose and direct interposition—believe in a fixed time and place; hear the rod and know it for their good (Job v. 6). "For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me; and many such things are with him" (xxiii. 14). **II. Wise men learn the lessons**

of God in the calamities of life. "The man of wisdom shall see thy name." They hear the voice and discern the majesty of God. They see the name of God, the power and presence of God in his dealings with men. The glory of the Divine attributes is displayed in the administrations of providence. 1. *They understand afflictive dispensations.* They hear and read what is spoken. They see the mind, the word of the Lord (Jer. ii. 31). Few are wise and understand these things. But wise men discern the truth of the rod in its reports of evil deeds and God's displeasure. "The knowledge of the Holy (One) is understanding." 2. *They submit to afflictive dispensations.* God's voice cries to all men, but the wise only hear and obey. They bow to the rod as under the command of God. They mourn for sin, learn righteousness (Is. xxviii. 21), and find that "the school of the cross is the school of light." By humiliation they seek to avoid or mitigate the stroke. When the blow has fallen they look to God "who hath appointed it," and learn the lessons of spiritual profit for which it was sent. "Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see." "Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?"

COMMERCIAL IMMORALITY.—*Verses* 10—12.

Here we have a special accusation of sins which procure the rod. Sins which are common in all ranks and committed after many admonitions. In social intercourse and business transactions covetousness, violence, and deceit prevailed. Riches were sought and acquired by cruel and unlawful means.

I. Fraud in the shops. Trickery has never lacked its representatives in all departments of trade. 1. *Dishonest dealings.* "Wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights." Rich sellers gave scant measure and short weight. They cheated and deceived the poor in the necessities of life. The law is violated in the present day. Are grocers, drapers, and corn-merchants always honest in business transactions? Why so many fines for "colouring," "adulteration," and fraud? "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in mete-yard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin shall ye have." 2. *Ill-gotten gains.* "The treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked." Wealth was sought by wickedness. The house was a store-room of vanity, a monument of injustice, and an abomination to God. To heap up wickedness is to treasure up wrath (Rom. ii. 5). "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing" (Prov. x. 2). **II. Oppression in the market-place.** "For the rich men thereof are full of violence:" not the poor out of distress, but the rich in covetousness and luxury, lived by violence. Dishonest bargains, hard dealings, and rapacity were daily events. Equity was ignored. Justice, the foundation of the state and the right of the citizen, was openly defied. Commerce was a means of gain, not of mutual help. National injustice was the fundamental sin of commercial life. Rank and power used in violence will crush the possessor. Robbery with authority will bring a curse. "Envy thou not the oppressor (a man of violence, marg.), and choose none of his ways." **III. Falsehood in the mouth of the poor.** "The inhabitants thereof have spoken lies." 1. This was a *common practice.* As often as they speak, in daily intercourse and conversation, "their tongue is deceitful (lit. deceit) in their mouth." Nothing but deceit, and deceit to ruin others and enrich themselves. 2. This was a *universal practice.* No exception is made. "A population of liars," says one. "It cannot be wrong for it is always done," "It would be impossible to carry on business in any other way," are pleas to justify the conduct of some in trade. Christianity requires no concealment, no misrepresentation, but strict adherence to truth. No earthly tribunal, no ancient custom, can exempt from eternal justice. An honest man will be guilty of no fraud. "The obligation of an honest man can never die," said De Foe. "Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 10. *Treasures of wickedness.* I. Illegal in their acquisition. Gained, 1. By dishonest means; 2. In opposition to Divine warning. II. Risky in their position. "In the house of the wicked," which is exposed to danger and decay. III. Unsatisfactory in their nature. IV. Doomed in their existence. No power or combination of circumstances can keep them from the judgment of God.

Ver. 11. He also has a false weight who judges not his neighbour with the same measure as himself [*Lange*]. God requires exact justice in all our dealings, and therefore it is our duty to take care that the weights and the balance be just [*Wells*]. Impositions; double dealings; the hard bargain struck with self-complacent shrewdness (Prov. xx. 14)—this is the *false balance* forbidden alike by law (Lev. xix. 35, 36), and gospel (Matt. vii. 12: Phil. iv. 8). Men may "commend its wisdom" (Luke xvi. 1—8); God not only forbids, but he *abominates* it (Prov. xi. 1) [*Bridge*].

Ver. 10—12. I. Men are apt to sin even after many admonitions. "Are there yet treasures," &c. II. Men are apt to dream of God's approbation in their sinful ways. Hence the challenge, "Shall I count them pure?" III. After they have enriched themselves by sinful ways they grow worse and openly oppress. "Full of violence." But God is a righteous judge, and will not acquit the guilty (Ex. xxxiv. 7). As men deal towards their fellow-men, so God deals with them. "Neither will he help the evil-doers" (Job viii. 20).

HOMILETICS.

Moral Consumption.—*Verses* 13, 14.

God threatens to smite Israel with mortal sickness; not so much bodily sickness, as desolation of land. By oppression they had made others weak, so Divine judgments will crush them by famine and invasion. Their calamity is a wasting sickness. The origin, seat, and consequences of this moral consumption are plainly described.

I. Sickness in the centre. "In the midst of thee." The sinking down, the wasting away, was in the very centre of the country. The capital, the seat of their wickedness and treasures, was smitten, and the plague spread among the people. Inward decay always begins at the heart. And when the vital parts are affected what can arrest its progress? **II. Sickness with sufficiency.** "Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied." They had abundance of wealth, an insatiable appetite, but their food did not nourish them. Their desires were a disease, not a moral strength. Like the deadly wasting that assails the human frame, there may be a spiritual atrophy to derange and emaciate the soul. The victim cries out with Job, "Thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me, and my leanness, rising up in me, beareth witness to my face." **III. Sickness aided by outward circumstances.** God's judgments only hastened on the end. The moral atmosphere was fœtid, and all their surroundings unfavourable to health. In God's favour is life; but he withdrew the fruit of the fields, and the blessings of the skies. When God departs from a people nothing will be left but inherent emptiness and pining consumption. "Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth." **IV. Sickness morally incurable.** "I will make thee sick in smiting thee." The sickness was the result of the smiting. "Thy wound is grievous," lit. makes sick. It was an incurable wound: "There is no healing of thy bruise" (Nah. iii. 4). Robbed of their families, smitten in their vineyards, and helpless in their condition, what hope of recovery was left! Spiritual leanness is the greatest calamity that can befall the Church. If God withdraws his help everything will decay. Life, light, and power, hope,

joy, and peace, will die away. Creeds and ceremonies will only hasten the ruin. Nothing can survive the death, the moral consumption, of true religion. "My leanness! my leanness! Woe unto me!"

Labour without Profit.—*Verses* 14, 15.

The judgments are further enumerated by which God would make them sick and desolate. They would sow and plant for others to reap. They would not be able to rescue what they had lost, nor preserve what they possessed from the foe. One stroke would follow another until the land was desolated, and its inhabitants put to shame.

I. Fields would be sown, but no harvest reaped. "Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap." The crops would be blasted and withered, or the enemy would reap them for himself. They reaped where they sowed not; so they must sow for others to reap. Sin provokes God to frustrate man's efforts to subsist. He takes from the covetous and unjust the fruit of their efforts just when it is within their grasp. If we wish to enjoy the results of our physical and intellectual labours, we must fear God and love justice. 1. The necessities, and 2. The luxuries of life, the fruit of the field, the oil, and the wine, depend upon the providence of God, and may be taken away in his anger. "Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes." **II. Goods would be rescued, but delivered up to the enemy.** "That which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword." Children on whose account they got their wealth, goods and substance for which they had toiled, would be suddenly taken from them. If anything at all was rescued, it was only for a time, and could not be held. No effort can deliver from the power of God's executioners. What we hold to be most precious is often most unsafe, and what we are determined not to lose that we lose suddenly. **III. Men would take flight, but could not escape.** "Thou shalt take hold," to rescue or remove to a safe place, but in vain, "but shalt not deliver." How can men flee from God's vengeance? No human hand can rescue from God's power. No harbour can hide from his presence. Heaven is the seat of his glory, earth the scene of his power, and hell the place of his wrath.

> "What can 'scape the eye of God all seeing,
> Or deceive his heart omniscient!" [*Milton.*]

Sins and Punishment: an Unbroken Link.—*Verse* 16.

This judgment the people brought upon themselves by their ungodly conduct. Their calamities were the results of their sins.

I. What were the sins of which they were guilty. *First.* They had broken the covenant of God and observed the statutes of men. "For the statutes of Omri are kept." By every motive of hope and fear they were commanded to obey God. This was the purpose of their existence, and the ground on which they held their privileges and country. But the Baal-worship of Omri was patronized and raised into the popular religion (1 Kings xvi. 31, 32). *Secondly.* They observed the doings of Ahab. Ahab's idolatry and persecuting spirit were commended. The luxury, wickedness, and oppression of the court were sanctioned. Yea, men more wicked than others, men who sold themselves "to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord," were their examples (1 Kings xxi. 25). 1. *These customs were diligently observed.* The margin gives, He doth keep diligently. One and all were kept as religious acts, in earnestness and diligence. 2. *These customs were universally observed.* Judah was at variance with Israel in many things, but they were one in apostasy. 3. *These customs were continually observed.* They had been introduced ages before Micah's time, yet he found them prevalent and all-powerful. Custom is the deposit of the past in the life of the present; the link which binds the present to the future. Thus evils are preserved and perpetuated from

one generation to another. **II. What was the punishment which followed these sins?** The actual results were very different from the expected fruits. Their conduct was so framed as if they had purposely desired the punishment. "That I should make thee a desolation." 1. *A privileged nation was made desolate.* They were deprived of their privileges and honour. Sin will desolate the richest nation and the most flourishing Church; make people an astonishment to some, and a hissing to others. 2. *An exalted nation was made a reproach.* "You shall bear the reproach of my people." They would have been God's people if they had kept his covenant, but their sins brought shame and reproach. The God whom they had forsaken and offended left them in the hands of the heathen. The conduct which they deemed wise and expedient proved fatal to its originators and imitators. True honour is only found in God's service. Sin and disgrace are bound together by an unbroken link. "We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 14, 15. 1. The law of God is the standard of right in all ages. The threatenings of the law of Moses were in force in the days of Micah (Lev. xxvi. 16: Deut. xxviii. 30). 2. The execution of the law in the history of a nation is not always a warning to a people. 3. The punishment of the law to such as continually violate it is most bitter. Disappointment in labour, deprivation of the necessities of life, troubles in the family and the nation. 'When our services of God are soured with sin," says a quaint author, "his providences will justly be embittered to us."

Ver. 16. *Statutes of Omri.* Idolatrous customs. 1. Originated by great men. 2. Sanctioned by a wicked court. 3. Observed by a religious people. Antiquity and priestly or princely authority are of no force against the command of God. Fashion rules with an iron sceptre, and those who ought to stand up for God, often bow to the law of man.

> "Custom's the world's great idol we adore,
> And knowing this, we seek to know no more."
> [*Pomfret.*]

Reproach. Sin in God's people is especially great. And as they have peculiar privileges, so their reproach or punishment is proportionable to their profaning of their privileges (Ezek. xxxvi. 20, 23) [*Hutcheson*]. "If professors of religion ruin themselves, their ruin will be the most reproachful of any; and they in a special manner will rise at the last day to everlasting shame and contempt."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VI.

Vers. 1, 2. *Hear.* If Adam needed to hear his Father's voice, sounding amid the fair bowers and the unshaded glory of Paradise, surely much more does this prodigal world, that has gone astray from him, need to hear a Father's voice asking after us, and the first intimations of a Father's desire that the lost may be found, and the dead at length become alive [*Dr Cumming*].

Vers. 3—5. Well fare their hearts who will not only wear out their shoes, but also their feet, in God's service, and yet gain not a shoe-latchet thereby [*Thos. Fuller*].

Remember. Wherever thou be, let the voice of God be still in thine ear. My son, return inwardly to thy heart, abstract thyself from all things, and mind me only [*Leighton*].

Vers. 6—8. God desires not merely outward virtue, but inward purity, and the penitent's sense of sin is greatly deepened as with astonishment he discovers this truth, and how far he is from satisfying the Divine command. Always has the Holy One estimated men by their inner nature, and not by their outward professions; to him the inward is as visible as the outward, and he rightly

judges that the essential character of an action lies in the motive of him who works it [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 9. *Rod.* The rod hath a voice that is in the hands of earthly fathers, but children hear it not, they understand it not till they are hushed and quiet, and brought to kiss it, and sit silently under it; no more shall we hear or understand the voice of the rod that is in our heavenly Father's hand, till we come to kiss it, and sit silently under it [*Brooks*].

Vers. 10, 11. Upright simplicity is the deepest wisdom, and perverse craft the merest shallowness [*Barrow*]. "No man is wise or safe but he that is honest." An upright posture is easier than a stooping one, because it is more natural, and one part is better supported by another; so it is easier to be an honest man than a knave [*Skelton*].

Vers. 12—15. Crafty counsels are joyful in the expectation, difficult in the management, and sad in the event [*Tacitus*]. "There is no law more just than that the contrivers of destruction should perish by their own acts." "The deceiver is often ruined by deceit."

Ver. 16. "The essence of wickedness is forsaking God." "Those are marked for ruin that are deaf to reproof and good counsel." Those that prefer the rules of carnal policy before Divine precepts, and the allurements of the world and the flesh before God's promises and comforts, despise His word, giving the preference to those things which stand in competition with it [*Matt. Henry*].

CHAPTER VII.

CRITICAL NOTES. The Church now mourns itself, and confesses that its condition is like a vintage after gleaning. **No cluster**] to be found. **Ripe fruit**] of excellent flavour chiefly desired. 2. **Good**] Heb. merciful and good to man (Ps. xii. 1); delivered from the evil to come (Is. lvii. 1); or cut off by those in wait for *blood*—lit. *bloods*, *i. e.* blood-shedding. **Net**] used for hunting (Hab. i. 15). **Brother**] Bound by law to love another as himself (Lev. xix 18). 3. **Evil**] Lit. Their hands are for evil, that they may do it *earnestly*, *i. e.* well, cleverly. **Great**] man. **He**] Emphatic, expresses *desire*, lit. *the* lust of his soul. **They**] Venal judges are ready to *wrap*, Heb. to weave or twist together; they pervert the cause of the poor. 4. **Best**] The prince asks, the judge grants, and the rich co-operate; all resemble the *brier* and *thorn-bush*, which only prick and injure. **Visit.**] Corruption is so high that judgment will break in upon them. **Perplex.**] They will be caught as victims, and not know what to do. 5. **Trust**] All are treacherous and pervert justice (Jer. ix. 2—6): confidence will be unsafe. **Guide**] And heads of families to whom we naturally look, unworthy of confidence. 6. **Dishon.**] Treats the father as a fool (Deut. xxxii. 15: Jer. xiv. 21). **Daughter**] witnesses against her mother (Ps. xxvii. 12). Treachery and faithlessness reach the nearest friends, and dissolve every family tie (cf. Matt. xxiv. 10—12). 7.] Having no hope from man, the prophet looks to God, and speaks in the name of the Church. **Salv.**] *i. e.* from whom all help comes. 8. **Rejoice**] The enemy must not think this condition to be perpetual; light will break through the darkness. 9.] Hence *bear* patiently the inflicted punishment (Lam. iii. 39), **until**] the promise of ver. 8 is fulfilled. 10. **Then**] the enemy will discover her mistake, be covered with shame, and be prostrated in the dust (Is. x. 6). 11.] This confidence rises. **Day**] Fences will be built up. **Decree**] The law imposed upon Israel by heathens, some; others, the decree of God for her captivity. 12. **That day**] when the walls are built, there shall come to thee. **He**] *i. e.* many from Assyria, &c., scattered believers and heathen nations. **From sea**] *i. e.* from the Mediterranean to the Persian Sea. **Mtn.**] *i. e.* from Sinai in the south to Lebanon in the north. 13. **Notwith.**] Glorious the prospect of restoration, yet remember judgment. **Land**] *i. e.* the earth as opposed to the Church of God in Zion alone will be deliverance, outside will be desolation. 14. **Feed**] Lit. rule; a prayer in the name of the people, to be fed on the fruitful mountain-range (Carmel) of the western sea-coast (Is. x. 18; xxxvii. 24), and by Bashan and Gilead, the rich pasture-land east of Jordan (Num. xxxii. 1. Deut. xxxii. 14: Jer. l. 19). 15. **Marvellous**] Wonders of grace, special manifestations of God's mercy, which will be repeated in the days of Messiah, will confound and silence the enemy (Ps. cvii.

42: Is. lii. 5). **16. Deaf.**] They shall be afraid of hearing them, because they continually fear new disasters, when they see the God of Israel to be so powerful [*Calvin*]. **17. Lick**] Abject prostration as suppliants (cf. Is. xlix. 23: lxv. 25); an allusion to Gen. iii. 14. **Worms**] Earth-creepers (Deut. xxxii. 24). Like snakes driven out of their hiding-place, or when charmed out of their holes, so nations come trembling out of their castles (Ps. xviii. 46), and tremble, flee to Jehovah with trembling, as alone able to help [cf. *Keil*]. **18.** In allusion to his own name, Micah praises God, and closes the book. **Who.**] The rescue from Egypt and the restoration predicted, exalt Jehovah above other gods, and reveal his incomparable grace and compassion (cf. Ex. xv. 11). **Passeth**] Not conniving at it, but forgiving it; not choosing to look into it (Prov. xix. 11: cf. Ps. cxxx. 3). **Heritage**] Surviving judgment, and typifying the remnant of grace (ch. iv. 7). **19. Subdue**] Lit. tread underfoot as something deadly; guilt and power of sin, both taken away. **Depths**] Like Egyptians into the Red Sea. **All**] not some; pardon, full and free. **20. Truth**] Faithful promise. **Mercy**] from which promises spring. **Fathers** (Ps. cv. 9, 10). Mercy and truth are the scarlet threads which run through the unity of God's plan from beginning to end [*Lange*]. The seed of the patriarchs should never perish, but would be restored as often as they turned to God. The mystery of this purpose is revealed by the Apostle (Rom. xi. 25, sqq.). "There is no prophetic denunciation of judgment against Israel, which is not concluded with promises of mercy" [*Abarbinel*].

HOMILETICS.

The Scarcity of Godly Men.—*Verses* 1, 2.

The prophet mourns that he lives in a degenerate age. Good men have perished. Instead of finding the nation like a ripe vintage, there is not "a cluster to eat." It is gleaned of the best and filled with the worst of men.

I. Godly men are scarce upon the earth. "The good man is perished out of the earth." We should not complain, like Elijah, for we are not left alone in the present day. Yet good men are few. 1. *Some are removed by cruelty.* They are cut off by those who "lie in wait for blood." In all ages the blood of martyrs has been freely spilt. The wicked plot and persecute, lie in ambuscade for the reputation and life of the godly now. All malice is cruelty, and would put to death those whom it hates. "Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men." 2. *Others perish by moral defection.* Iniquity abounds, and the love of many grows cold. Difficulties and dangers terrify some, others are not sincere, get disappointed, and "draw back unto perdition." "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us no doubt they would have continued with us." 3. *Many are taken away by death.* Good men ripen on earth for the blessedness of heaven. They are gathered like the summer fruits, and thus escape the severity of winter. "Merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come." **II. The scarcity of godly men upon the earth is a cause of regret.** "Woe is me!" Godly men are precious and profitable as the first ripe fruits; useful to the Christian Church and the world. 1. *They are a loss to the Christian Church.* Their presence and example adorn and strengthen the Church. They are pillars. "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." We require the wisdom and zeal, the faith and power, of former ages. Every death seems to diminish the faithful, and make them "as the grape-gleanings of the vintage." 2. *They are a loss to the world.* As lights their influence is diffusive and blessed. "Like the sun," says Hume, "they cheer, invigorate, and sustain the surrounding world." As salt they preserve the earth from corruption, and quicken men to higher life. Their prayers draw blessings from heaven, and ward off judgments from men. They refresh and fructify the place in which they dwell. When they die, justice, benevolence, and beauty depart. "The world is upheld by the veracity of good men," says Emerson; "they make the earth wholesome. They who lived with them found life glad and nutritious." "The saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent in whom is all my delight."

MATURITY REQUIRED BY GOD.—*Verse* 1.

These words may be taken as expressing God's desire for ripeness or maturity in grace. Hence they relate to our experience, character, and efforts.

I. God requires maturity in human experience. "My soul desired the first ripe fruit." 1. *The unconverted must be renewed.* No clusters of grace and beauty adorn their conduct. They are like trees without foliage and fruit. Barren and unfruitful in the works and ways of God.

> "Here elements have lost their uses,
> Air ripens not, nor earth produces" [*Swift*].

2. *The penitent must ripen in humility.* Not mere blossoms of sorrow, but fruits meet for repentance must be produced. Penitence and pardon, faith and holiness, must be visible. "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." **II. God requires maturity in Christian character.** Christian character grows. In this growth are seed time and harvest; progress in knowledge and holiness. There are babes, but we must come to the full stature, not the mere outline, but the perfect likeness in Christ. "He is but the counterfeit of a Christian who hath not the life of a Christian," says one. All the virtues of Christian conduct must ripen. God is glorified, and ministers glad, when we bring forth much fruit. "I desire fruit that may abound to your account." **III. God requires maturity in personal effort.** There must be thought and maturity in everything. 1. In *efforts* we must put forth our strength and work earnestly. Whatsoever our hands find to do, must be done with all our might. Decision and energy must be thrown into every undertaking. 2. In *offerings* we must give the first ripe fruit. In sacred worship and daily life let there be nothing sour and unripe. In the Sunday-school and the sick-room, think, prepare, and do your best. David would not offer to God of that which cost nothing. If we spare the seed we shall reap no harvest (Prov. xi. 24: 2 Cor. ix. 6); but thorough consecration will secure overflowing vintage. "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. The moral contrast or, 1. What is desired. "The first ripe fruit." 2. What is really found. "There is no cluster to eat" (ver. 1).

Ver. 2. The picture of a good man. 1. *The good man in his character.* Good here means merciful, actively good and benevolent to men. 2. *The good man in his influence.* He upholds justice, checks corruptions, and testifies to God. When merciful men die, uprightness goes and cruelty enters the land. "The good man is perished, and there is none upright." 3. *The good man in his death.* The Church and the servants of God lament the loss. "Woe is me!"

> "A combination, and a form, indeed,
> Where every god did seem to set his seal,
> To give the world assurance of a man."
> [*Shakespeare.*]

Brotherly cruelty. "They hunt every man his brother." 1. Wicked men plan to assail others. 2. These plans are crafty. Nets of various kinds laid to ensnare. 3. These crafty plans often succeed. Fraud is added to force, and craft to cruelty. The guilt is greater because a brother, by race or grace, is humbled. Nearest friends are often entrapped like birds by the fowler.

Every man is the brother of every man, because he is a man, born of the same first parent, children of the same Father: yet they lay wait for one another, as hunters for wild beasts (cf. Ps. xxxv. 7; lvii. 7: Jer. v. 26) [*Pusey*].

> "O what are these?
> Death's ministers, not men: who thus deal death
> Inhumanly to men; and multiply
> Ten thousandfold the sin of him who slew
> His brother" [*Milton*].

HOMILETICS.

With Both Hands Earnestly.—*Verse* 3.

There is little of excellence in mere earnestness. The more earnest a man is in vital error, he inflicts, of necessity, the deeper injury on the interests of truth and men. The wicked men, in this picture of the prophet, stand in the very attitude which every good man should assume in the work of God.

I. Without hands. Some good men seem to be without hands. "They *have* hands, but they handle not; feet have they, but they walk not." They work with hands in other things; strive manfully in a political struggle, or in a question of social right. They are diligent in business, but in Christian work idle, both hands drop down and there they stand—*without hands.* "Curse ye Meroz, curse ye bitterly!" Why? What had Meroz done to merit the curse? Nothing. That was the sin, that she had "*not* come up to the help of the Lord." **II. With one hand.** This is the second state in which many serve God. This is well to begin with, but a little more must be added, and *so* the service must grow into fulness. The Apostles were grand workers, learned by watching and following him who went about doing good. They were but one-handed men, made many mistakes, but got the use of both hands in time. The Master has always a great company of young workers, some young in life, some young in toil, but all learning and needing the word of encouragement from those of more experience. If you are speaking for Christ, anywhere, at any time, doing but a little service in a quiet way; God speed you in your work. **III. With both hands** we say to all one-handed men; for there *is* no perfection, even of a relative kind, with one. Both hands are given for use; the other will not be idle, but will grasp at something, raise up another force of evil to balance Christian activity; so life in a little while will be in poise, not in motion; then in a little longer there will be motion, but in a wrong way. "*With both hands*" for safety. With all the powers and with all the talents given. None of them must rust, all must go out in use. How few things there are in the house, in labour, in business, that we can do with one hand! David's men "were mighty men, helpers of the war; they were armed with bows, and could use *both the right hand and the left.*" These are the men whom Christ needs to fight his battles and do his work; "workmen needing not to be ashamed" of the work they do, or of the way in which they do it. **IV.** There is a higher, the highest stage of obedience, expressed by *all* the words of the text, *with both hands earnestly.* It is not enough that the talents be laid out; they must be laid out to the best advantage. Every power and passion must be enlisted, baptized, inspired and energized in Christian service. This is just *the* thing to make some happy, heroic, and victorious. They work with both hands—the mechanism is perfect and the action steady—but it is *mechanical* not *vital* action. Christian earnestness is not mere vehemence and heat: it is "*zeal according to knowledge.*" Many reasons might be urged for an earnest life: *Self-preservation requires it.* Our faculties and senses cannot be kept bright and clear without use. The rust of moral decay will be within us unless we work "*with our might.*" *Honesty requires it.* We have undertaken a great service—if at all—on certain terms, clear conditions laid down by the Master. We must fulfil them or we do not live fairly. *Benevolence requires it.* If we love our fellow-men, the one thing we can do for them above all other things in value is, to live truly and intensely before them. *Gratitude requires it.* This is *all* we can do for Christ. He will take nothing from us but this. *Time requires it.* Not one of us would go out of the world without having lived for some time in it in this way. The future is unknown, and carries secrets undisclosed. We are not fully matched with the day unless working "with both hands earnestly" [*Raleigh*].

UNIVERSAL CORRUPTION AND UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT.—*Verses* 3—6.

Corruption is prevalent in all ranks of the community, rests upon a compromise of the ruling classes, and thus the foundations of morality are destroyed.

I. Universal corruption. Sin was veiled under the name of virtue, or committed in the pretence of justice. 1. *In official ranks.* Men in authority expose justice for sale and avow bribery. They play into the hands of others to strengthen themselves in evil. (1.) *The prince* asks for gifts. (2.) *The judge* seeks reward. (3.) *The nobleman* utters his mischievous desires. 2. *In religous professions.* "The best of them is as a briar." The most upright and moral were carried away with the sins of the day. They were crooked in their dispositions, and sharper than thorns in their ways. Instead of being a protection to others, they were positively injurious and oppressive. 3. *In social circles.* Faith was not kept anywhere; all to a man were treacherous (Jer. ix. 2—6). (1.) A *friend* was not to be trusted. (2.) The heads of families would not help and advise. The *guide* or counsellor, and the *wife* of his bosom (Deut. xiii. 6), were alike guilty. (3.) The members of families were in a state of lawlessness and impiety. Natural relationship was perverted. The son called the father a fool. The daughter testifies against her mother, and a man's foes were found in his own household. Oppression was followed by inhumanity. The strongest ties of nature and religion were dissolved. A moral condition descriptive of the last times of the gospel dispensation (Luke xxi. 16: 2 Tim. iii. 1—3). **II. Universal judgment.** When men become oppressive and dangerous, and moral disease becomes universal, it is a sign of approaching ruin. 1. *There will be a day of visitation.* "Thy visitation cometh." Men's actions and lives are seen by God. God will reckon with them and visit them with punishment for sin. 2. *This day of visitation is foretold.* Watchmen and prophets foresee it and warn men of its speedy approach. 3. *When it comes and finds men unprepared it is terrible.* "Now shall be their perplexity." Sinners are heedless, and the day breaks suddenly upon them. They will be caught in their own snares and, as they entangled others, they will not be able to escape their own retribution. "For it is a day of trouble and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord God of Hosts."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 3. *The triple alliance for evil.* Union is good, is necessary and advantageous, but alliance for evil is disgraceful and injurious. 1. The *Prince* asks *i.e.* for the condemnation of the righteous and innocent. 2. The *Judge* grants for recompense or reward. 3. The *great man* co-operates with both. "So they wrap it up," turn and twist their efforts into a threefold cord which cannot easily be broken.

Ver. 4. *Men as briers.* Giving grief for help, and fleecing when they ought to protect. Hard and sharp in their dealings; piercing and injurious in their conduct. "Folden together as thorns" (Nah. i. 10).

Vers. 5, 6. It is a part of the perplexity of crooked ways, that all relationships are put out of joint. Selfishness rends each from the other, and disjoints the whole frame of society. Passions and sin break every band of friendship, kindred, gratitude, nature. The words describe partly the inward corruption, partly the outward causes which shall call it forth. There is no real trust in any, where all are corrupt. The words deepen as they go on. First, *the friend*, or neighbour, the common band of man and man; then *the guide* (or, as the word also means, one *familiar*, united by intimacy, to whom by continual intercourse the soul was *used*); then the wife who lay in the bosom, nearest to the secrets of the heart; then those to whom also reverence is due, *father* and *mother* [*Pusey*].

1. There is no sure hold upon any man, however strictly he be bound, who

is declining from God, and hath not a tender conscience standing in awe of him; for in this declining time, *friends, guides, wives*, &c., are not to be trusted in. 2. In times of defection and backsliding, the godly out of love should believe all things (1 Cor. xiii. 7), and not easily take prejudice, and to walk warily and prudently; *Trust not*, saith he, put no confidence, keep the doors of thy mouth, especially trust in or look to none for help, but only in God [*Hutcheson*].

HOMILETICS.

Three Resolutions.—*Verse* 7.

The prophet is predicting a period which marvellously corresponds to the first age of the Christian era. For, he says, the day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh, the time our Lord foretold, when Jerusalem was destroyed. Then the Church was as sheep among wolves. Princes indeed did evil with both hands earnestly. Judges like Pilate could pronounce in a breath, that the accused was innocent and yet condemn. Treachery crept into every home. Hypocrisy prevailed the land over. The Church was in the midst of uncompromising enemies. The nearest of their relatives, as fathers and sons, betrayed them to persecution and death. There was no help for them in man. So the eyes of faith turned to God alone. He would not fail them. Each of us should adopt these resolutions. Many reasons indicate the wisdom of so doing.

I. The resolution of faith. "I will look." 1. The promises encourage me. 2. Experience teaches me. 3. The Lord commands me. 4. The engagement will comfort me. **II. The resolution of patience.** "I will wait." 1. For his time is best. 2. For his blessing is worth waiting for. 3. For I shall not be disappointed. **III. The confidence of hope.** "God will hear." 1. Though my cry be feeble and my faith weak. 2. Though my request be great. 3. Though others disdain me. 4. Though I am alone. Few pleaders in Israel. 5. For he is near [*Stems and Twigs*].

He turned away from creatures, knowing they were broken cisterns that could hold no water; and turned towards God "the fountain of living waters." "Therefore," he says, "I will look unto the Lord." Observe, first, that this is *a designed experience*, and not a casual one, on *God's* side. God is more concerned for our welfare than we are ourselves—does not wait for our application, but excites it. For this purpose He has given the Sabbath, the Scriptures, the sanctuary, and the preaching of the Gospel. All these dispensations are arranged in subserviency to the purpose of his grace and our afflictions. He therefore says, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offences and seek my face." Elihu, reviewing afflictive dispensations, says, "All these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit," &c. Observe, secondly, it is *a necessary experience* on our part. God does nothing needlessly, and we may be assured that he doth not "afflict willingly." We have a strong propensity to turn away, to make flesh our arm, and earth our home; but "the prosperity of fools destroys them," the things ordained for their welfare prove "a trap." Hence, though trying, these dispensations improve us by the goodness of God. He "hedges up our way with thorns," that we may not be able to "find our paths." He embitters earth, that heaven may be endeared, and verifies the language of Dr. Young: "Our hearts are fasten'd to the world," &c. Oh! it is a *blessed experience* when, with the Church, we are thrown from ourselves and from creatures upon the Divine resources [*Jay*].

God maintaining the Interests and securing the Triumph of His People.—*Verses* 8—10.

Now the Prophet holds out hope, and gives special grounds of consolation and

encouragement. God watches over his people, and will not suffer them to be destroyed.

I. The sad condition of God's people. 1. *Cast into trouble.* "When I fall.' The strongest saint is infirm and liable to fall. Sin within and temptation without overcome us. Disasters may strip us of everything, and sorrow bring to the grave. But the fall shall not be fatal. "Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down." 2. *Sitting in darkness.* "I sit in darkness." The darkness of doubt, captivity, and mysterious providence. Clouds hang over us, friends desert us, and shadows hide God from us. "We walk in darkness and have no light" (Isa. l. 10). 3. *Mocked by the enemy.* The enemy has advantage sometimes over God's people, and treats them with insult and reproach. The world exults at the fall of a godly man. "Malice is folly," says one, "and when it holds a festival its tones and gestures far exceed all the freaks and mummeries of the lord of misrule." "They opened their mouth wide against me, and said, Aha, Aha, our eye hath seen it." **II. The blessed hope of God's people.** God chastises his children, but does not give them up to despair. Neither despond nor mistrust him. "He shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea, in seven shall no evil touch thee." 1. *Lifted up from trouble.* "I shall rise." Trials have their limits and design. If we "have the will to rise, he is at hand who will cause thee to rise," says a Father. The sinner lies when he falls, and perishes without recovery. "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief." 2. *Enlightened in darkness.* "The Lord a light unto me." Shadows disperse; joy and brightness beam upon our lot. Darkness of sorrow and ill-repute flee away, and noon-day splendours shine again. "The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light." 3. *Restoration to lost privileges.* God will declare the right of his people, make their glory conspicuous, and restore them to former dignities. They shall be publicly honoured and greatly enriched with the covenant bles-ings. "I shall behold his righteousness." **III. The sure triumph of God's people.** The truly godly man has been subject to derision in every age. Men have asked in scorn, "Where is the Lord thy God?" But the triumph of the wicked is short. 1. *Joy will be turned to shame.* The enemy rejoiced in God's apparent forgetfulness of his people, and laughed at their profession of confidence in him. But God punished the blasphemy cast upon his name and the calumny heaped upon his children. The enemy was disappointed, confounded, and covered with shame. 2. *Deliverance from the enemy will be complete.* Judgment will be executed upon the enemy. He will be treated as straw, and trodden as mire in the streets. "And they shall be as mighty men which tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle; and they shall fight because the Lord is with them."

Light in Darkness.—*Verse 7.*

1. *In dark spiritual experience* God will be a light unto us. When sin is strong and grace is weak—when comforts fail and sorrows multiply—when faith yields and unbelief prevails—when we search for God and find him not—then he will succour and fill our hearts with light and gladness. 2. *In dark providential dispensations* God will be a light unto us. When the clouds are black above, and our way is dark, and we know not where to go—when every fresh turn of events serves to increase our perplexity—when the scenes through which we pass defy all mortal wisdom—then he will disperse the gloom and reveal our way before us. 3. *In the darkness of death* God will be a light unto us. When we enter the damp thick shades of the tomb—when all earthly lights, even those that have burned with the steadiest and purest lustre, will be extinguished—then the Lord will be our light. He will guide our feet, we shall pass through the dark valley without danger, and enter the regions of eternal day.

"Then let me not despairing mourn,
Though gloomy darkness spread the sky;
My glorious Sun will yet return,
And night with all its horrors fly" [*Adapted*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 8. *When I fall, I shall rise.* A strange event and a strong hope. Trials (*a*) must be expected, (*b*) are temporary, (*c*) have their results, and (*d*) must be endured in hope. These words contain sweet comfort for slandered saints.

Ver. 9. 1. Sin is the cause of Divine indignation. Men make themselves rods by their own guilt. "Because I have sinned against him." 2. This Divine indignation must be received as fatherly chastisement. If we murmur and get impatient, the end has not been yet answered. "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" 3. Such as bear Divine indignation in the right spirit will be delivered. Bear it patiently, hopefully. The time is short, "until he plead." His promise is good. "He will bring me forth."

HOMILETICS.

A Glorious Day.—*Verses* 11, 12.

The Prophet predicts a glorious time, when Jerusalem shall be divested of enclosures and narrowness; when the Church shall be enlarged by the return of captives and the conversion of nations.

I. A day of deliverance from bondage. "In that day shall the decree be far removed." God's decree to punish, and the decree of Nebuchadnezzar to retain in captivity. Tyrannical rule would be destroyed, and perfect freedom enjoyed. No power on earth can detain God's people in bondage when he intends to deliver. **II. A day of gathering together the scattered tribes.** From fortress and fortified cities; from sea to sea, and from the utmost bounds of the earth, shall captive Jews return. As proselytes from all nations came to Jerusalem of old, so shall converts from north and south flow into the Christian Church. "In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt," &c. (Isa. xix. 23). **III. A day of peaceful restoration.** The walls of Zion shall no longer be in ruins. They shall be reared for a habitation and defence. Sin pulls down the walls and creates mischief. God alone can prosper and establish the Church. Without his aid we build in vain. Our prayer should ever be, "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

The Land Cursed by the Sins of its Inhabitants.—*Verse* 13.

Salvation may come to the people, but the desolation of their land would remind them of their sins. However glorious the prospect, "the fruit of their doings" would curse the country in which they lived. Many are the sins of a people which are calamities to the land in which they are committed. We notice a few.

I. National idleness is a curse to the land. The ground is cursed by the sin of man, but will yield produce when cultivated. But idleness will bring ruin in all departments of trade. As men sow, so must they reap in this respect. **II. National intemperance is a curse to the land.** It squanders financial resources, aggravates the curse of poverty, and leads to failure in the means of comfort and subsistence. It devours savings and capital; and causes theft and destruction of property. **III. National war is a curse to the land.** Devastated fields, the destruction of towns and villages, are some of the fruits of men's doings. In many ways judgments from God, as real as the fire upon the cities of the plain, desolate the

ground because of them that dwell therein (Hos. iv. 3: Jer. xxiii. 10: Gen. xix. 25). "A fruitful land into barrenness for the wickedness of them that dwell herein."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 11, 12. These words are a promise and consolation to the Jews, for their restoration is here foretold as Micah had already foretold it (ch. iv. 10). But the whole is not limited to this. He says with remarkable indefiniteness, *there shall come*. He does not say *who* shall come. But he twice sets two opposite boundaries, from which men should come; and since these boundaries, not being coincident, cannot be predicted of one and the same subject, there must be two distinct incomings. While in the first place the restoration of Israel is foretold, there follows that conversion of the world which Micah had before promised (iv. 1—3), and which was the object of the restoration of Israel [*Pusey*].

1. The Lord will in due time restore and make up the ruins of his destroyed Church and people; for *thy walls are to be built*. 2. God's time is to be patiently waited for in the restoration of his Church; for there is *the day* for doing it which he will keep, and no sooner. 3. As it is one of the greatest trials to the Church, to lie under the tyranny and oppression of strangers, who, by decrees and injunctions executed with vigour, labour to ruin her and destroy the work of God; so, when he has wrought his work upon his Church by such trial, the Lord will deliver them from the yoke, set them at liberty to serve him and enjoy tranquillity without interruptions; for, *in that day the decree shall be removed* [*Hutcheson*].

The fate of the earth and the glory of Zion are here set forth. Zion is multiplied by the addition of Gentiles, but judgment falls upon a sinful world. Salvation and peace within, danger and destruction without.

HOMILETICS.

The Work of God.—*Verse* 14.

When we consider the symbolic language of the sacred writers, and the typical nature of the Jewish dispensations, we are authorized to pass from the natural to the spiritual Israel. 1. Observe the *persons* to be favoured; "His people." He has always had a people for his Name, described as "the flock of his heritage." This indicates that they are sheep, and collectively all one in Christ. A man may have a flock in his possession, and under his superintendence, but not the flock of his heritage. In the East a person's whole substance consisted in flocks and herds. He would feel a peculiar concern for them as his own. The Lord takes pleasure in his people. They are his portion, and he derives the revenue of his glory from them. 2. See the *blessing* implored on their behalf; "feed thy people with thy rod." The rod is the symbol and the instrument of the shepherd, and the word *feed*, by a common figure of speech, is significant of the discharge of all his office. The Lord will lead them by his Word and Spirit, heal them when wounded or diseased, guard them in danger, and restore them when astray. Especially does he give repast and repose. Hence the inquiry, when hungry and thirsty, weary and faint: "Tell me where thou *feedest*, where thou makest thy flock to *rest* at noon." The believer can often say, "The Lord is my shepherd," &c. 3. But how was the privilege to be dispensed. "In the midst of *Carmel* let them feed, in *Bashan* and *Gilead*, as in *days of old*." Thus the richest measure and degree of provisions are indicated. Suppliants may be choosers. God giveth liberally and upbraideth not. "Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." When Alexander bestowed a boon the recipient would say, 'It is too much for me to receive." But the conqueror of the world would reply, "It is not too much for me to give" [*Adapted from Jay*].

The People of God.—*Verses* 14, 15.

1. *God's people are a separated people.* As Israel was choosen and separated from other nations, so God's people are in the world but do not belong to it. They "dwell solitarily," live apart from worldly men, who think only of time and sense. They are alone in their character, tastes, and pursuits (Num. xxiii. 9: Deut. xxxiii. 28). 2. *God's people are a protected people.* God rules, and defends them. He teaches, reproves, and delivers with his "rod." The flock may be scattered, helpless, and alone, but the kind Shepherd will protect and bless them (Ps. xxiii. 3). 3. *God's people are an enriched people.* "Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead." The greatest pastures of Canaan typify the blessings of God's people. (1.) *Enriched in a wonderful degree.* Rest and refreshment without stint. (2.) *Enriched in a wonderful method.* "As in the days of old." As in Egypt, so now would God display "marvellous things." Wonders of grace will eclipse miracles of power. God will do for his people more than he has ever done. "So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will show forth thy praise to all generations."

Wonderful Answers to Prayer.—*Verses* 15—17.

In answer to the prophet's prayer God declares that he will perform marvellous things, in bestowing good upon his people, and entirely subduing their enemies.

I. **In the bestowment of good upon his people.** In the deliverance from Egypt and entrance into the land of promise, wondrous things were seen. Redemption from Babylon was a blessing, a "great thing" which gladdened the heart (Ps. cxxxvi. 1—3). Special manifestations of mercy are seen now. From the beginning to the end of Christian life, God will show them his marvellous loving-kindness (Ps. xvii. 7). II. **In the overthrow of their enemies.** "The nations shall see" these marvellous deeds of God to his people, and be astonished and confounded. 1. *They shall be frustrated in their purpose.* "Confounded at all their might." They failed in their opposition. *All* their might proved weakness. Human power can avail nothing against God's people and their endurance in suffering. Its strength is baffled before the might of God's grace. 2. *They shall be silenced in their slander.* "They shall lay their hand upon their mouth, ashamed of what they have said, and unable to say any more." Their ears shall be deaf "to the report of God's dealings," before the thunder of Jehovah's mighty deeds (Job xxvi. 14). Extreme astonishment will take away the power of speech (Judges xviii. 19: Isa. lii. 15). 3. *They shall be humbled in their pride.* To lick the dust is an emblem of extreme humility. They will be cast down as low as possible, to the very earth. As they lifted themselves up against God, so will they be abased, like the serpent under the curse of old (cf. Ps. lxxii. 9; xxii. 29). "They shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet." 4. *They shall be exposed in their folly.* Brought out of their hiding-places, they will tremble in fear. Like worms of the earth, they shall move out of their holes. No security nor secret place can protect them. Discovered in their designs, ashamed of their conduct, they will stand before God in that fear which is a foretaste of the judgment-day (Luke xxiii. 30: Rev. vi. 16).

"Wit that can creep, and pride that licks the dust" [*Pope*].

God Delighting in Mercy.—*Verse* 18.

The Prophet saw mercy unequalled in God's dealings with Israel. The heathen gods and all imaginary gods of men are unholy, revengeful, and cruel. "Who is God like unto thee," &c.?

I. **God's mercy is founded upon God's nature.** It is not something without him, or something acquired like human virtues. It belongs naturally to God. It is something without which he would not be God. It is the essence and

manifestation of God. "God is love." All attributes join together in his character and ways, but mercy is the brightest ray. Judgment is strange work, but mercy is a delight to God. He puts his anger by, and while he corrects he ever loves. "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him." **II. God's mercy is displayed in God's works.** In the physical and moral world we have abundant illustrations of this truth. 1. *In the physical world* we have proofs of God's mercy. Famine, pestilence, and dearth often come, but they pass away. Mercy dawns again in seed-time and harvest, summer and winter. The rain falls and the sun shines upon the just and the unjust. The world, in its laws and constitution, indicates no malevolent Creator. 2. *In the moral world* we have proofs of God's mercy. In the Divine forbearance with sin, and the moral constitution of men; in the conversion of the sinner, and the life of the believer, mercy is displayed beyond expression. In Christ we have mercy like a fountain full and free. Paul was a pattern of this mercy to others. If the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return unto God, "he will have mercy upon him and abundantly pardon." This truth, (1) Sets forth the highest excellence in every moral being. To be like God is the crown and substance of moral life. (2) Gives a reason to trust God at all times. A God who delights in mercy can never be indifferent to our happiness. (3) Furnishes an argument to be merciful to others. "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy."

No Pardon like God's Pardon.—*Verse* 18.

The Prophet here makes a challenge to other deities, and vindicates the glory of God. "Who is a God like unto thee?" exclaim all who have embraced the mercy and received the forgiveness of God.

I. No pardon like God's in the ground of its bestowment. It is not connivance nor mere clemency. It does not ignore sin nor set aside justice. It is pardon through substitution and satisfaction, bought with a price and conferred in a method to honour the law and magnify Divine love. God can be just, and the justifier of him that believeth. Cæsar, shaking his sword, said to the Questor, who sought to prevent his entrance into the treasury at Rome, that it was easier for his power than for the goodness of his nature to despatch him. God might justly have punished, but he spares and is ready to pardon.

"Here the whole Deity is known;
Nor dares a creature guess
Which of the glories brighter shone,
The justice or the grace."

II. No pardon like God's in the method of its bestowment. 1. In *freeness* it is unexampled. Men are reluctant to forgive when earnestly desired, begrudge forgiveness and cherish resentment when it is bestowed. But God waits to be gracious, multiplies pardons, and makes overtures, beseeching us to be reconciled to him. "Come now, and let us reason together." 2. In *fulness* it is complete. It is not for one but for all sins. "Forgiving *iniquity* and *transgression* and *sin*." It needs no supplement, no repetition. It is once and for ever—sins are forgiven and forgotten. Cast into the depths of the sea, blotted out as a thick cloud, not to be gathered again. He retains no anger, but looks upon us as if we had never sinned. We are not therefore to judge God by ourselves, and measure his pardoning love by a standard of our own. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Exulting Confidence in God's Mercy.—*Verses* 19, 20.

The Jews now avow full confidence in God's mercy. He had often pitied and delivered them. But his compassions were not exhausted, would be exercised again in displays of power and love. "He will again," &c.

I. Confidence in the bestowment of God's grace. Grace in the pardon and subduing of sin, in showing compassion and restoring to Divine favour. 1. *In the pardon of sin.* Sin is passed by, left unpunished, and God does not "*mark* iniquities" (Ps. cxxx. 3). It is buried in eternal oblivion, never more to rise in view. As in the Red Sea not one enemy of God's people was left, so in the pardon of sin none are remembered. "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none: and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found; for I will pardon them whom I reserve." 2. *In the subduing of sin.* "He will subdue our iniquities." He takes away the guilt and destroys the power of sin. Sin is tyrannical, and reduces man to bondage. It combats the moral principles and is victorious over the moral nature of man. Christ gives freedom from the dominion and consequences of sin, and implants a new rule within us.

"Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power."

3. *In the restoration to Divine favour.* The Jews were not subdued in Babylon. They were turned again and found that compassion which they had often forfeited. God turns to the sinner and prepares him for his presence. He is reconciled to men in Christ Jesus. When they turn to him, he will turn again to them. **II. Confidence in the performance of God's word.** "Thou wilt perform the truth." Return from captivity was a striking instance of the fidelity and kindness of God in his covenant promise. But this is only a type of a greater display in the mission of the Messiah. 1. *In all ages.* In the days of the patriarchs and of the prophets. To Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and Micah. 2. *To all people.* Jews and Gentiles. God's mercy and truth are alike pledged to perform his word. "For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these things."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 15. Here is a present and full answer to the Church's prayer; so ready is the Lord to fulfil the desire of the righteous. It is but ask and have; and they are worthily miserable that will not make themselves happy by asking. The sum of Christ's answer is this: As I led Joseph like a flock out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and fed them there, daily and daintily, with angels' food (never was prince so served in his greatest pomp), so will I show thee marvellous things at Babylon, and bring thee thence with a mighty hand (Ezek. xx. 34), to make me a glorious name (Isa. lxiii. 14), and both these deliverances shall be a certain type of thy spiritual redemption by Christ. Lo, this will I do for thee as in the days of old (ver. 14), and so fit mine answer ad cardinem desiderii; give thee not only the desire of thine heart, but the request of thy lips (Ps. xxi. 2), let it be to thee even as thou wilt (Matt. xv. 28) [*Trapp*].

Vers. 16 17. The subjugation of the enemies of God's people, a proof, 1. of Divine power over men; 2. Divine goodness to the Church; 3. a ground of encouragement to trust God.

Ver. 18. God delights in mercy. Illustrate and prove the text. 1. *Scripture proves this truth.* In its laws, doctrines, histories, and promises. 2. *The works of God prove this truth.* The world made for the theatre of mercy, providence displayed in giving mercy. 3. *All the perfections of God are employed to illustrate this mercy.* God's name emblazoned in mercy, his hands employed in bestowing mercy. Power, wisdom, justice and truth are on the side of mercy. Let us delight in mercy [*Dr. R. Vaughan*]. The text is also illustrated: By the beauty and fitness of creation. By the great regard paid to mercy and the merciful in the word of God. By the teachings of providence. By the commission that he gave his Son. By the purpose for which the ungodly are spared. By the urgent way in which

God asks sinners to be reconciled to him. By the way in which he receives and pardons sinners. By the way in which he deals with the infirmities of his own people. By the reception he gives them at the end of life. Learn: how had it been with us if God had revealed all concerning himself except his mercy? He might as well not have revealed it, if we have not sought and found it. If we have not found mercy, there is every encouragement to seek it. Let us seek more of this mercy, and show it more to others every day [*Class and Desk*].

Ver. 19. *He will subdue our iniquities.* The term subdue (lit. tread under-foot) is military, and indicates spiritual warfare. 1. *The enemies.* "Iniquities." Many, powerful, within and without. 2. *The conquest.* We are helpless. "Mine iniquities prevail against me." Hence (1) Divine. "*He*" will, &c. (2) complete. "He will *subdue*." 3. *The means of conquest.* Faith in Christ. Grace in the heart. Sanctification by the Spirit. "By my Spirit, saith the Lord." "We have purified our souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit."

God's pardon. 1. Unequalled in method. 2. Incessant in exercise. 3. Unmerited in principle. 4. Immeasurable in degree. 5. Blessed in results.

Ver. 20. 1. The different aspects of God's covenant. *Mercy* to Abraham, *truth* to Jacob, an *oath* to the fathers. 2. The certainty of its performance. Spoken, written, and sworn to. 3. The confidence which this should beget in our minds. God is mindful of his people, and faithful to his word. "Thou *wilt* perform," &c.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VII.

Vers. 1, 2. *Good men few.* They say that fish smell first at the head, and when godly men decay, the whole commonwealth will soon go rotten. We must not, however, be rash in our judgment on this point, for Elijah erred in counting himself the only servant of God alive, when there were thousands whom the Lord held in reserve [*Spurgeon*].

Vers. 3, 4. Man is nothing but insincerity, falsehood, and hypocrisy, both in regard to himself and in regard to others. He does not wish that he should be told the truth; he shuns saying it to others; and all these moods, so inconsistent with justice and reason, have their roots in his heart [*Pascal*].

"Faithless is earth, and faithless are the skies!
Justice is fled, and truth is now no more."
[*Virgil, Æneid.*]

Vers. 5—7.

"Lean not on earth; twill pierce thee to the heart:
A broken reed at best, but oft a spear:
On its sharp point peace bleeds, and hope expires."
[*Young.*]

Vers. 7—9. A holy silence unstrings every affliction, it takes off the weight of every burden, it adds sweet to every bitter, it changes dark nights into sunshiny days. The smallest sufferings will easily vanquish an unquiet spirit, but a quiet spirit will as easily triumph over the greatest sufferings [*Brooks*]. Ver. 9. *Indignation.* Though of all burdens the indignation of the Lord be the greatest burden, yet Divine indignation is but a light burden in comparison of sin. A gracious soul can better stand under the burden of God's indignation for sin, than it can stand under the burden of sin itself, which hath kindled that indignation [*Ibid.*].

Ver. 12. From *mountain to mountain* probably includes all subdivisions of our habitable earth, as the words, from *sea to sea*, had embraced it as a whole. For, physically and to sight, mountains are the great natural divisions of our earth. Rivers are but the means of transit. The Euphrates and the Nile were the centres of the kingdoms which lay upon them. Each range of mountains, as it rises on the horizon, seems to present an insuperable barrier. No barrier should avail to hinder the onflow to the Gospel. Isaiah foretold that all obstacles should be removed, "Every valley shall be exalted," &c. (xl. 4); so Micah prophesies from mountain to mountain [*Pusey*].

Ver. 18. *Mercy and pardon.* Mercy hath but its name from misery, and is no

other thing than to lay another's misery to heart [*Binney*]. The forgiveness that there is with God is such as becomes him, such as is suitable to his greatness, his goodness, and all other excellencies of his nature; such as that therefore by which he will be known to be God. It is not like that narrow, difficult, halving, and manacled forgiveness, that is found among men; but it is full, free, bottomless, boundless, absolute; such as becomes his nature and his excellencies [*Owen*].

Vers. 19, 20. A merchant that keeps a book of debit and credit, writes both what is owing him, and what he oweth himself, and then casteth up the whole; but God does not so. his *mercy* is triumphant over his *justice*, and therefore he wipes out what we owe him, and writes down what he owes us by promise; much like the clouds that receive ill vapours from us, yet returning them to us again in sweet refreshing showers [*Nath. Shute*, 1626]. *Truth.* The revolutions caused by the progress of truth are always beneficial to society, and are only burthensome to those who deceive and oppress [*Du Marsais*]. The light of God's truth must not be left to burn secretly within the recesses of the sanctuary, but must be applied to the kindling of a thousand torches in the hands of those who are commissioned to carry it forth into the thick darkness of a sinful world [*Blomfield*].

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

NAHUM.

INTRODUCTION.

The Writer. Little is known concerning the Prophet Nahum. He was a native of Elkosh (ch. i. 1); and prophesied soon after Isaiah and Micah, viz., after the carrying away of the ten tribes by the Assyrians (B. C. 721), and after the destruction of the army of Sennacherib at the walls of Jerusalem (B. C. 712), and before the fall of Nineveh [*Wordsworth*].

The Book. It is the complement and the counterpart of the book of Jonah, says Pusey. Nineveh repented after Jonah's preaching, and God was represented as merciful. But in the time of Nahum the city had fallen into violence, and the judgment of God is proclaimed. Nineveh had no more place for repentance, and the Prophet pronounces sentence. Both books form connected parts of one moral history.

Contents. The phrase, "the burden of Nineveh," intimates that Nineveh is the object of the prophecy. There are three parts. "The *first* (1) contains the introduction (1—10) and the theme of the Prophet's oracle (11—14). The *second* (2) sets forth the calamity which should come upon the Assyrian empire. The *third* (3) recapitulates the reasons for the judgments that should be thus inflicted, and announces the certainty of their coming. The whole forms one continuous composition."

Style. His poetry puts him in the first rank of Hebrew literature. His sentences are brief, contain *multum in parvo*, as in the descriptions of God, the siege of Nineveh, and the destruction of No-Ammon. "He is inferior to none of the minor prophets, and scarcely to Isaiah himself, in animation, boldness, and sublimity; or to the extent and proportion of his book, in the variety, freshness, richness, elegance, and force of his imagery. The rhythm is regular and singularly beautiful; and with the exception of a few foreign or provincial words, his language possesses the highest degree of classical purity. His description of the Divine character at the commencement is truly majestic; that of the siege and fall of Nineveh inimitably graphic, vivid, and impressive" [*Henderson*]. "In the *organism* of Scripture, Nahum occupies an important position, not so much on account of the theological as of the historical significance of his prophecy. Its

theological importance culminates in the representation of God, Jehovah, Sabaoth (cf. ii. 13), as the actual Judge—a representation accurately adapted to the situation of the world; and this description is not essentially different from that in the earliest public writings and those of the preceding prophets." [*Lange*]. Nahum has also a message to men and nations in these latter days. If having received the message of the Gospel from the Divine Jonah, which is Christ, they fall away by unbelief, as it was predicted by Christ and his Apostles (Luke xviii. 8; Matt. xxiv. 12; 1 Tim. iv. 1), that many do, then they may see their destiny in the prophecy of Nahum, foretelling the misery and shame, confusion, overthrow, and desolation of the great city of Nineveh, which is the prophetic type of the sin and doom of the Infidel form of Anti-Christianism [*Wordsworth*].

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Burden]** (Vulg. *onus*), from a word *to lift up*, a threatening utterance; some, heavy and full. **2. Jealous]**, (words from the decalogue), to be warm. Burns against those who hate him (Deut. vi. 15). The term indicates feeling of injured right, and strong inclination for justice. **Furious]** Lit. a *lord* or *master* of fury: a master of dreams. *i. e.* a dreamer, &c. **Reserveth]** Applied to God, sig. to keep or bear wrath (Lev. xix. 18: Ps. ciii. 9). **3. Acquit]** Clear the guilty (Ex. xx. 7; xxxiv. 7). **Dust]** Light dust easily raised. **4. Rebuketh]** (Matt. viii. 26). **5.]** Fruitful districts fade under his wrath. **Burned]** Lit. lifts itself as in an earthquake (Ps. lxxxix. 10), hence to burn as a flame. **6. Abide]** Stand up before wrath poured out like fire from a volcano, which rends rocks to pieces (1 Kings xix. 11: Jer. xxiii. 29). **7. Strong]** A fortress. **Knoweth]** Stands emphatically for the knowledge with which God fosters and provides for his elect, and which is experienced by them (Hos. xiii. 5) [*Lange*]. **8. Over.]** Judgment by invading armies, sweeps through the land like overwhelming floods (cf. Ps. xlii. 7: Isa. viii. 7, 8: Hab. iii. 10). **9.]** The city must be destroyed and its inhabitants perish. **Imagine]** By means of defence to ward off danger. **Second]** time from Assyria (cf. Isa. li. 17—23: 2 Sam. xx. 10). **10. Thorns]** twisted together, to appear inseparable, and present a bristling front (2 Sam. xxiii. 6, 7). **Drunken]** Assyrian kings proverbial for intemperance and revelry. **11. One]** Sennacherib. **Thee]** From Nineveh itself arises its own ruin. **Counsellor]** Lit. a counsellor of Belial, worthless and bad; designs to overthrow the kingdom of God (Isa. xxxvi. 14—20). **12—14.]** Repeat the truths of 9—11. Good to Judah, and evil to Assyria, predicted. **Quiet]** In tranquil security; or *complete* with unbroken ranks and number, with everything necessary for a successful siege. "The word may also be designed to convey the idea of mental completeness, *i. e* in this connexion, *security, martial courage*" [*Hend.*]. **Cut]** Mown down like the harvest (2 Kings xix. 35: Isa. xxxvii. 36, 37). Give historical facts. **13. Yoke]** The tribute to Assyria (cf. Isa. x. 27: Jer. ii. 20). **14.]** The name and power of Assyria to become extinct. **Sown]** The seed or race to be for ever destroyed, at destruction of Nineveh the dynasty would not be perpetuated. **Gods]** Every kind of images (Deut. xxvii. 15). (See Layard's *Nineveh and its Remains*, on Idol. of Assyria.) **House]** The palace considered sacred. **Make]** *i. e.* the house of thy gods, thy grave. Sennacherib slain during worship (2 Kings xix. 37). **Vile]** Because when weighed according to moral standards worthless (Job xxxi. 6), found light (Dan. v. 27). **15.]** This verse joined to ch. ii. in Heb. text, and nearly like (Isa. lii. 7). Here deliverance from Assyria, not Babylon. **Tidings]** Overthrow of Sennacherib. **Mountains]** No longer covered with hostile camps to prevent keeping feasts. **Peace]** and deliverance, *i. e.* great yearly feasts of thanksgiving. **Wicked]** Lit. Belial (ver. 11), marg. = Sennacherib. **This is a wonderful type of Gospel events; salvation through Christ, victory over sin, death, and hell.**

HOMILETICS.

THE SERVANT'S BURDEN.—*Verse* 1.

In this verse we have the substance and object, the form and author, of the whole prophecy.

I. **The nature of the burden.** A burden is something heavy and important. 1. *The commission from God was a burden.* An awful responsibility, a solemn duty imposed upon the messenger. Who is sufficient for these things? 2. *The commission was a burden upon the mind of the prophet.* He was not reluctant to obey, but its solemnity weighed heavily upon him. He had to threaten judgment upon his fellow-creatures, to be faithful in his threatening, and declare the whole message from God. His duty was a burden. He was deeply sensible of its import, of his own unworthiness and weakness. This is the spirit of all true servants. "A dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me." **II. The form of the burden.** "The book of the vision." 1. It was first *a vision* to the prophet. He saw what he uttered. He had a commission from God, and spoke in God's authority. We should always testify what we have seen, and declare what we have been taught. Some speak a vision of their own heart (Jer. xxiii. 16); but God's servants see the vision of the Almighty. 2. Then the vision was *recorded in a*

book. Reason teaches us to write laws and record events in a book. God's prophets were taught to pen their thoughts in a permanent form for the benefit of future ages. "Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." **III. The object of the burden.** "The burden of Nineveh. Nineveh repented once, but returned to its wicked ways again. The first was a message of mercy, the second one of judgment. If men despise warnings they must expect rebukes. Employed by God to chastise, Nineveh sought to destroy the chosen people. Now God will punish the city, and its last state will be worse than the first. If men return to their former sins because judgment is not executed, if they cease to do the good they once begin, then God will withdraw his promised favour. "If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them."

JEHOVAH A JEALOUS GOD.—*Verses* 2—5.

God's judgments are traced to God's jealousy as the cause of them. His honour is injured. His tender feeling for his people is wounded, and though punishment is suspended for a time, eventually it is certain and severe.

I. God's jealousy is connected with God's long-suffering. "The Lord is slow to anger." Towards enemies even God is long-suffering. For one hundred years he had endured the wickedness of the Assyrians. Judgments are often delayed. 1. *This delay is not through weakness.* "Great in power." Men cannot execute their vengeance because they lack power. But God has all power, and can accomplish his will at all times. 2. *This delay is not remission of punishment.* He "will not at all acquit the wicked." There is a limitation of mercy. He will not clear the guilty, nor leave them unpunished. He is not insensible to violations of his law, nor dilatory to vindicate his justice. Sinners have a respite in love, but not a reprieve in weakness. All who abuse his long-suffering will smart at last. "For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God." **II. God's jealousy is often provoked to vengeance.** "And the Lord revengeth." Vengeance is a defect, and censured in man. Here it is predicated of God three times. 1. *Vengeance is associated with provocation.* Slow to anger, he can be provoked. His jealousy has the warmth of love and the fire of wrath. "The coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." 2. *Vengeance is associated with mastery.* "And is furious," a master of fury, one who has anger under control. He is Lord of vengeance. "One who, if he pleases," says Grotius, "can most readily give effect to his fury." 3. *Vengeance is associated with execution.* He reserves wrath for his enemies, not because he is angry, but because he is slow to anger. He allows it to accumulate, before execution. But he "will take vengeance on his adversaries." (*a*) This execution is *swift*. He comes in the storm and the whirlwind (ver. 3). He sweeps men away swift as the wind. "As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more." (*b*) This execution is *easy*. The clouds are the mere dust of his feet. As man walks upon the dust, so Jehovah tramples upon the clouds, as the light dust of his feet. (*c*) This execution is *mysterious*. "Clouds and darkness are round about Him." His purpose and his agents are often concealed, until they break upon the guilty like a lightning flash. (*d*) This execution is often *terrible*. The heavens above and the earth beneath feel the shock of his wrath. The sea is rebuked by his power, and the fertility of the land is consumed by his presence. The mountains quake and the hills melt; all nature trembles beneath his anger. No one can stand before fury like this. The strongest will quail, the hardest will melt. "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. The Burden. The Bearer. The Destination. "He first defines the object of the prophecy, whereto it looks; then states who spake it, and whence it was" [*Pusey*].

Ver. 2. The titles of God rise in awe; first, *intensely jealous* and *Avenger;* then an *Avenger* and a *Lord of wrath;* the master of it (not as man, mastered by it); having it to withhold or discharge; yet so discharging it, at last, the more irrevocably on the finally impenitent [*Ibid.*].

The justice and severity of God should be contemplated. 1. As a warning to his enemies to deter them from evil. 2. As a consolation to his people to help them in trouble.

Ver. 3 Mercy, omnipotence, and justice. 1. *The first attribute of God.* "Slow to anger." Because he never smites without first threatening. He is very slow to threaten. When God threatens, how slow he is to sentence the criminal! And when the sentence is signed and sealed, how slow to carry it out! Trace the attribute to its source. Why is God slow to anger? Because he is infinitely good. Because he is great. 2. The connecting link. A great reason why he is slow, because he is *great in power.* He that is great in power can restrain himself, and is greater than he that takes a city. When God's power restrains himself, then it is power indeed. If he were less of a God than he is, he would long ere this have sent forth thunders and emptied the magazines of heaven. Bless God that the greatness of his power is our protection. 3. The last and most terrible attribute; *He will not at all acquit the wicked.* Unfold this first of all, then trace it to its source. God will not acquit the wicked. Never once has he blotted out sin without punishment. Calvary proves the truth of that. The wonders of vengeance in the Old Testament and hell itself are proofs of the text. *Trace this terrible attribute to its source.* Why is this? God will not acquit the wicked, *because he is good.* Goodness itself demands the punishment of the sinner. The *justice of God* demands it. If in Christ, never be afraid of God's power. If not fled for refuge, then God will not acquit, but punish. Reprieved but not pardoned art thou. Reprieve will soon run out, haste to the refuge [*Spurgeon*].

Way in the whirlwind. The vengeance of God comes at last swiftly, vehemently, fearfully, irresistibly [*Pusey*].

Clouds the dust. 1. God *hidden* in his ways. *Clouds* are round about him. Deep and unsearchable in his counsels. 1. God *powerful* in his ways. Treading on the clouds, and making them as dust to his feet. 2. God *terrible* in his ways (vers. 4 and 6). Not difficult to put the elements in motion to destroy Nineveh or impenitent sinners. Great things to us are small with him. All nature subject to his control.

Vers. 4, 5. The quaking of all things in the presence of an angry God. Celestial and terrestrial agencies subservient to the purpose of God, (*a*) in punishing the wicked, (*b*) in protecting his people. "The huge roots of the towering mountains are torn up when the Lord bestirs himself in anger to smite the enemies of his people. How shall puny man be able to face it out with God when the very mountains quake with fear? Let not the boaster dream that his present false confidence will support him in the dread day of wrath."

HOMILETICS.

God's Goodness and Anger.—*Verses* 6, 7.

Note two things in these words.

I. Jehovah's anger. 1. *It is real.* Human theories of it are not always true. They are got up to persuade the sinner that he has no need to be alarmed for guilt. But God's words are true—not exaggerations. 2. *It is righteous.* Not

the rage of selfishness nor personal offence; but the anger of a righteous judge against sin, dishonoured right and insulted law. There is nothing in it unjust or arbitrary. 3. *It is terrible.* Though calm, it is awful and overwhelming. No power or numbers can withstand it. Expulsion from Paradise, the flood, the ruin of Sodom, and the destruction of the ungodly, are specimens. 4. *It is inexorable.* Nothing can turn it aside or quench it when kindled. **II. Jehovah's goodness.** He is good, and doeth good; kind to the unthankful and unholy. 1. *His goodness is sincere.* He does not utter words and feelings which are not in him. His words mean what they say, his deeds what they indicate. "God is not man that he should lie." 2. *His goodness is powerful.* Almighty goodness. He is able to deliver those whom he loves. Their interests are safe in his hands. 3. *His goodness is watchful.* His eyes are upon us at all times, expecially in trouble. An unsleeping eye, an untiring hand, never weary of blessing, ever delighting to love and help us. 4. *His goodness is unchanging.* Without variableness like himself, ever flowing and not ebbing. Not like the tides and the seasons, his heart changes not. But the great day of his wrath will come. Judgment lingers not. He spares in pity, not willing that any should perish. Turn unto him, &c. [*Dr. H. Bonar.*]

The Triumph of Faith.—*Verse 7.*

Here we have a beautiful description of the security and comfort of those who trust in God in the day of distress.

I. *God a Protection.* Not armies, fleets, and fortresses. All other refuges are refuges of lies. He is the only accessible, impregnable, delightful shelter. II. *God a Comfort.* "The Lord is good." Good in himself and to others. His goodness is spontaneous, undeserved, and boundless; consistent with the perfections of his character, and adapted to the wants of our nature. III. *God a Friend.* "He knoweth." He not merely perceives and understands; but approves, acknowledges, and takes delight in us. He "takes pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy." God is our friend. His attitude to us is like that to Abraham: "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 7. *The Lord is Good.* He is essentially—immutably good—infinitely good. The good of all creation is derived from him. "He is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." But goodness does not appear in its highest forms here. These creatures never forfeited care and kindness. We have rebelled, and as children of disobedience deserve wrath. Yet he spares us, and provides for us—fitted up the world with sights, sounds, and relishes to our appetites. But if the bounties of nature and providence were stopped, we could say, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us," &c. This *ensures* every other blessing. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" This *involves* every other. He is "all in all." By him and in him we are "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places" [*Jay*].

The Lord a Stronghold. From whence does this trouble arise? *From danger?* He is our strength for protection. "The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" "We are more than conquerors." *From duty?* He is the strength to assist. If oppressed with a sense of our inability, "our sufficiency is of God." *From affliction?* He is our strength to support and deliver. If he does not release, he sustains and comforts. "My grace is sufficient for thee." Whatever the nature and degree of affliction, in God we find a "very present help in the day of trouble" [*Jay*].

Vers. 7, 8. *God a refuge to his people,*

who are safe, happy, and cared for in his protection. *God a terror to their enemies*, who are overwhelmed with calamities (flood), pursued with darkness, and completely destroyed. God's people only afflicted for a short time, but of the wicked he will make "an utter end."

HOMILETICS.

Resistance to God powerless.—*Verses* 9—11.

Nahum now turns to the invaders, boldly challenges them for their opposition to Jehovah, again describes their ruin, and for the encouragement of the Jews, adds that they should not be annoyed any more.

I. Resistance to God in its nature. "What do ye imagine against the Lord?" 1. *Resistance in thought.* "Imagine." They thought that they had to do with a weak people, and would gain an easy victory. But they had to encounter God. It is vain presumption to plot against him. "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord." 2. *Resistance in word.* Many imagined evil, but one leader was specially prominent in counsel. Sennacherib in the mouth of Rabshakeh advised worthless and wicked plans (cf. Isa. xxxvi. 14—20). Crafty counsellors are most mischievous, and often bring ruin upon themselves and their country. 3. *Resistance in act.* Plots ripen into enterprises. Wicked thoughts lead to denial of God's power and providence; to contempt of God's people, and opposition to God's purpose. He sent "to reproach the loving God" (2 Kings xix. 16), and blasphemed "against the Holy One of Israel" (ver. 22). **II. Resistance in its method.** The metaphors of ver. 10 may be taken in many senses. Briars and thorns denote hostile armies (Isa. x. 17; xxvii. 4). 1. *Resistance combined.* "Closely interwoven as thorns." They strengthen one another, and are inveterate towards God. Like the military phalanxes of antiquity, they were armed and arranged to present a bold front. Thorns, "because they cannot be taken with hands" (2 Sam. xxiii. 6). 2. *Resistance audacious.* Flushed with success, the Assyrians regarded themselves as invincible, and gave themselves to wine and revelry. Benhadad was smitten while drinking in his pavilions (1 Kings xx. 16); Belshazzar was feasting when Babylon was taken (Dan. v. 1—30). Yet in this condition men have the audacity to resist God. Intoxicated with pride they are prepared for their fall. **III. Resistance in its end.** Men's devices are idle when God works. 1. *The people were prepared for ruin.* "They shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." Dry stubble easily takes fire, and thorns folded together are ready for the flames. Wicked men are often compared to stubble, and God's judgments to devouring fire. Those who defy God's will only fit themselves for the fire that is never quenched. 2. *Ruin was certain.* "He makes an utter end." The destruction is absolutely fixed and sure. No second attempt will be made. One stroke of the Angel destroyed the Assyrian armies. One blast from heaven levelled Nineveh in the dust. Now Nineveh—great Nineveh—the pride of its inhabitants, the terror of its neighbours, and the envy of the world, has fallen. Its celebrity ceased, and its site for ages remained unknown—

> "Behold the pride of pomp,
> The throne of nations fallen, obscured in dust,
> Even yet majestical—the silent scene
> Elates the soul" [*Dyer*].

The Destruction of the Enemy, and the Redemption of God's People.—*Verses* 12—15.

Here good is predicted to Judah, and evil to the enemy. One shall be purified and restored, the other utterly annihilated.

I. The destruction of the enemy. The Prophet notices their present condition, and contrasts it with future ruin. 1. *They are unbroken in strength.* "Though

they *be quiet.*" If they be entire, sound and unharmed, perfect in warlike preparations, that will not avail them. 2. *They are undiminished in number.* "And likewise many." Their numbers were unimpaired and great. Hezekiah thus exhorted the people: "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him" (2 Chron. xxxii. 7). 3. *They are secure in tranquillity.* "Quiet," that is, without fear, and perfectly safe. They were free from attacks, and securely fortified, but not against God. They pictured an easy march and a splendid victory in the land, "When he shall pass through;" but the vast host was swept away in a single night. Notice their future. 1. *Idolatry will be destroyed.* "Out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image." Their gods in the temple, graven and molten, would not help them, nor be spared by the enemy. God has a controversy with all kinds of idols. The fate of a nation is often bound up with the fate of its God. 2. *The dynasty would be extinguished.* "No more of thy name be sown." If not immediately, yet eventually the Assyrian line would cease. God commanded this, and it was certain to happen. Their splendid renown would fade away and their name be cut off. The race would be cut down without chance of springing again. "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." 3. *The palace would be turned into a grave.* "I will make (the house of thy gods) thy grave." The temple was polluted by slaughter, and converted into a sepulchre (Isa. xxxvii. 38; 2 Kings xix. 37). Men perish in the things in which they seek refuge. The Assyrian power was destroyed. God made a grave for its idols and its people. All were *vile* and light; found wanting when weighed in the balance (Dan. v. 27). Whatever honour man set upon them, they were lightly esteemed by God. Wickedness in religious and political life brings contempt and ruin upon a nation. "The seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned."

> "God needs no indirect nor lawless course
> To cut off those who have offended Him" [*Shakespeare*].

II. The redemption of God's people. Deliverance from the enemy would be followed by restoration of worship and peace. All sorrow would end, and every cause of fear be overcome. 1. *Deliverance would be enjoyed.* The news would be proclaimed and welcomed throughout the kingdom. If to Sophocles the hands and feet of any one who went on errands of mercy were beautiful, how much more should the heralds of the gospel be received by all who hear them. (1) *Deliverance from affliction.* "Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more." The bitter potion will not be repeated, unless there be real necessity. God doth not afflict willingly, and former trials should not hinder faith in present good. (2) *Deliverance from the enemy.* Servitude no longer. (*a*) *From the yoke of the enemy.* A victorious army shall no longer tax and oppress. "Now will I break his yoke from off thee." (*b*) *From the fear of the enemy.* He shall be completely subdued, and no trace of his steps left behind. He will be cut off in spirit, number, and existence. "The wicked shall no more pass through thee." 2. *Worship would be restored.* Solemn *feasts* would be kept. The free use and thorough enjoyment of religious ordinances would be restored. *Vows* would be performed, and gratitude continually abound. The ransomed of the Lord would return to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. It is our privilege to behold the feet of those who publish peace with God and salvation through Christ. If we believe we may keep our feasts in gladness, and anticipate the glory of that temple into which the wicked never enter.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 12. *Cut down* like grass in a field. The completeness of the destruction, and the ease with which it is done. Greatness and number nothing with God.

Ver. 13. The affliction of the Church. "*Yoke.*" The method of deliverance. "*Break* his yoke." The *agent* who works it. "*I* will break." "By the strength of my hand I have done it" (Isa. x. 13). The *time* in which it is done. "God, lest his own should despair, does not put them off altogether to a distant day, but saith *now*" [*Pusey*].

Ver. 14. It is sufficient ground of assurance for the coming to pass of greatest things, that the Lord hath determined they should be; for, this is given as a sure ground of Assyria's ruin, that *the Lord hath given a commandment*, or purposed their destruction, his purpose concluding as effectually the concurring of all means to bring it about, as if they were especially commanded. *Name.* "The Lord doth justly root out the memory of such persons or states, as make it their only work to get a name on earth, and to be eminent and terrible; for such is Assyria's doom: *no more of thy name shall be sown*" [*Hutcheson*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1. *Burden.* He who possesses the virtues required in the care of souls, should not take upon him the priestly office, unless constrained to it; and he who knows he has them not, should not take it upon him, even though he were compelled to it [*Gregory*].

Ver. 2. *Vengeance.* When God sees it necessary to vindicate the honour of his justice to the world, he doth it with that severity which may make us apprehend his displeasure; and yet with that mercy which may encourage us to repent and return unto the Lord [*Stillingfleet*].

Ver. 3. *Slow.* God delays the punishment of wickedness, and does not strike presently, for a glorious manifestation of his holy attribute of patience. His two great attributes of justice and mercy, the full season of their manifestation upon the vessels of wrath and mercy, is at an end at the great day of reckoning [*Bp. Browning*].

Vers. 3, 4. This passage is so sublime, says one, that it would be difficult to find its equal. May the reader's heart adore the God before whom the unconscious earth and sky act as if they recognized their Maker, and were moved with a tremor of reverence. "Vain are the attempts of men to conceal anything from him whose word unbars the deep, and lifts the doors of earth from their hinges! Vain are all hopes of resistance, for a whisper of his voice makes the whole earth quail in abject terror" [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 7. He who avails himself of a refuge is one who is forced to fly. It is a quiet retreat from a pursuing enemy. And there are trials, and temptations, and enemies, from which the Christian does best to fly. He cannot resist them. They are too strong for him. His wisdom is to fly into the refuge of the secret place of his God, to rest under the shadow of the Almighty. His strength is to sit still there (Isa. xxx. 7) [*B. M. Duncan*].

Vers. 8—12. When God shakes men as dust from under the summer thrashing-floor, the right hand of a man's strength is as powerless as the left hand of a man's weakness, and his wisdom is as folly. What avails the wisdom of the apple to make it cling to the bough when it is ripe in autumn time? or the wisdom of the leaf to hold it fast to the stem when the tempest calls? or the wisdom of the tree to make it stand secure when a rock from the cliff comes crashing down through its puny branches? When God sends storms upon men, they must imitate the humble grass, which saves itself by lying down. Therefore it is said, "Humble yourselves before the mighty hand of God, that in due season he may raise you up" [*H. W. Beecher*].

Ver. 14. *Name.* Thou mayest choose whether thou wilt be remembered to thy praise or to thy shame [*Bishop Pilkington*].

"He left a name, at which the world grew pale,
To point a moral, or adorn a tale."
[*Samuel Johnson.*]

Ver. 15. *Peace*, newly granted by the grace of God, was to be celebrated by a

new consecration of the people. This has special reference to the king of Nineveh and Assyria, and the promise must have been very precious to contemporaries oppressed by Assyria. But to us the fundamental truth is far more important, that to the people of God a perfect deliverance is near at hand, and has already appeared in Christ, by which the Belial, from whom every wicked spirit proceeds, is for ever cast out [*Lange*].

"Come, and begin Thy reign
Of everlasting peace;
Come, take the kingdom to Thyself,
Great King of Righteousness" [*Bonar*].

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES. **Dasheth**] Lit. disperser. **Keep**] in Judah peace, in Nineveh tumult. **Watch**] for the enemy. **Loins**] Prepare for conflict (Job xl. 7). Every means of defence will be necessary. **2.**] The Lord hath chastised Judah and Israel, and permitted the enemy to triumph; now the *excellency* of Israel, the former independence, shall be restored. **Emptied**] Devastations, taken from vine-pruning and cutting young twigs (Psal. lxxx. 9). **3. Red**] with blood or paint, or overlaid with copper. **Scarlet**] Crimson, the fighting dress of the nations. **Torches**] Chariot-wheels like flaming torches in rapidity and motion (Isa. v. 28). **Day**] of equipment; to prepare, to equip for battle (Jer. xlvi. 14: Ezek. vii. 14). **Fir trees**] Shields and lances made of fir, brandished and thrown with destructive power. **4. Rage**] The chariots, driven in fury, jostle one against another, and run as lightning (Luke x. 18), in the market-place of the city. **5. He**] King of Nineveh, shall muster choicest troops. **Worthies**] Heroes or brave men (Judg. v. 13: Neh. iii. 5). **Stumble**] through fear and haste. **Defence**] The covering used by besiegers. **6.**] From the siege the prophet passes rapidly to the capture of the city. **Gates**] The rivers round the city break their sluices and overflood it. **7. Huzzab**] Probably Nineveh; some, the queen of Nineveh. Like a queen she shall be dethroned and dishonoured; her maids mourn like doves over her fate (Isa. xxxviii. 14). **Tabering**] Beating their breasts, a mournful attitude (Luke xviii. 23). **8. Old**] From antiquity hath been like a pool of water; the confluence of people from all parts, like countless drops; an unbroken empire for 600 years. **Stand**] Stand is the cry, but all flee away. **9. Take**] God bids the conquerors to plunder. "This does not happen by chance, but because God determines to avenge the injuries inflicted upon his people" [*Calvin*]. **10. Empty**] Lit. emptiness, and emptiedness and waste. The city is left, without its wealth and monuments, a complete ruin. The vanquished are horrified at the destruction, despond, can hardly keep on their feet, and turn pale. "The completeness of her judgment is declared first under that solemn number, Three, and the three words in Hebrew are nearly the same, with the same meaning, only each word fuller than the former, as picturing a growing desolation; and then under four heads (in all seven); also a growing fear" [*Pusey*]. **11. Where**] is the site on which the mighty city once stood? Its warriors crushed the nations like *lions* in their lust and power. "To fill up the picture, the epithets applied to the lions are grouped together according to the difference of sex and age" [*Keil*]. **12.**] Description of tyranny and predatory lust of Assyrian kings. **13.**] The destruction is certain. *I* against thee; God has proclaimed, and will fulfil it. Her war-chariots, *i. e.* the whole apparatus of war [*Calvin*], will be consumed by smoke; imperial might shall no longer prey upon the nations, and emissaries, with the king's commands or exacting tribute, shall be seen no more (Ezek. xix. 9).

HOMILETICS.

THE CAUSE AND PREPARATIONS OF WAR.—*Verse* 1.

Whether these words be applied to the Jews defending Jerusalem, or to the Ninevites defending their city against the Medo-Babylonian army, their meaning is the same. They begin a lively description of the siege.

I. **The cause of the war.** "For the emptiers have emptied them out." 1. *The Assyrians had oppressed God's people.* They had abused their power in the chastisement of Israel, plundered the people, and outrageously destroyed their vines. Now the emptiers must be emptied, and those who chastised others must be chastised themselves. "Power abused brings a curse upon its possessors. Power gives temptation, which in turn sets aside honour, social duty, law, and right; creates abuse; and abuse, strife, confusion, retribution, bloodshed, sin" [*Bailey*].

2. *God's purpose concerning his people was accomplished.* The enemy falls, but God will restore his people. He will re-establish the glory of Israel which Asshur had destroyed. Its eminence, by virtue of its election, will no longer be tarnished. God sees an excellency in his people which the world does not, and eventually will make them "an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations." **II. The approach of the enemy.** "He that dasheth in pieces is come up." Notice, 1. *The nature of the enemy.* "The dasher in pieces," not a hammer of war, but one whom God employed to scatter other nations. The feeblest people, in God's hands, may be a terror to others The mightiest nations, intoxicated with success, and abusive of their privileges, may be broken in pieces like a potter's vessel. 2. *The nearness of the enemy.* "Before thy face." Direct against her, face to face. Men are not sensible of their danger, put the evil day far off, when it is nigh at hand. "Serious things to-morrow," said the ancient prince, who gave himself to revelry, and was ruined with his kingdom. **III. The defence of the city.** Some take the words ironically, and equivalent to a prediction. Thou shalt defend thyself, but all in vain. The most powerful and courageous preparations are matters of derision before God. 1. *Keep the fortress.* "Keep the munition." Strong walls, though unassailable by human skill, would not be secure. 2. *Guard the avenues.* "Watch the way" by which the foe may come and repel him. Prevent entrance into the city. 3. *Encourage one another.* "Make thy loins strong." Gather up courage, and let nothing be unemployed. Stand, having your loins girt about like men (Ephes. vi. 14: Job xl. 7). 4. *Resist mightily.* "Fortify thy power mightily." It is a desperate affair, no careless, timid defence will avail. Nor will the utmost the wicked can do prevail against God. Impotent are all efforts of defence when God has departed from a place. "The Lord hath opened his armoury, and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation: for this is the work of the Lord God of hosts in the land of the Chaldeans."

The Great Siege and the Vain Defence.—*Verses* 3—7.

The assailing army is now described in its might and compactness, its warlike appearance and design. Notice,

I. The besieging force. The order and equipment are graphically pictured. 1. *The army is formidable.* Many are spoken of as one. The soldiers are valiant and accustomed to victory, Divinely collected, and deterred by no foe. 2. *The army is terrific.* Blood-red in uniform. Chariots like flames of fire, and spears like waving forests. No quarter given. Like flames they intend to set all on fire. 3. *The army is invincible.* Its career has been triumphant, and its success is sure. Against such generals as Cyrus the Younger and Alexander the Great, numbers avail not. They appeared in the joyous splendour of Divine warriors (cf. 2 Kings vi. 17), and in the colour of those who execute Divine judgments (Zech. i. 8: Rev. vi. 4). The heroes are God's heroes, and the bewilderment in the city is from the power of God. **II. The vain defence.** The inhabitants are summoned together, and no means of defence are neglected. 1. *Brave men are summoned to their post.* "He shall recount his worthies." All is at stake. The leaders especially must set an example of courage. But they are struck with terror, run in perplexity, and through fear or lack of strength fall, "stumble in their walk." They rush to the walls, but the enemies are already attacking under cover. It is too late. 2. *The river became an enemy to the city.* The enemy had been three times defeated. The city was intact, and the hosts were encamped before its gates in vain. But a sudden inundation, more violent than usual, burst the sluices and the mighty flood broke down the walls. 3. *The royal citadel was destroyed.* "The palace shall be *dissolved*." The king utterly despaired, shut himself up with his slaves and concubines in his residence, kindled the whole and perished in the flames. One ground of confidence after another failed. The mighty men, the

river and the temple, were no protection. Neither the palace of the princes nor the temple of the gods can shelter those whom God will punish. "Of old the funeral pile was erected; yea, for the king it was prepared deep and large: it was prepared with fire and much wood, and the breath of God, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it." 4. *The inhabitants mourned.* The people of the city, under the figure of a captive woman; and her maids, the lesser cities, as female attendants on the royal city, were brought to shame and distress. (*a*) They were destroyed by the flood, or (*b*) They were led captives, and (*c*) They grieved at their fate. As a queen Nineveh was dethroned and dishonoured. In helplessness and grief she mourned as a dove. If we do not repent in time no "worthies" or "defence" will turn away eternal lamentation and despair.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

The overthrow of the enemy of God is not the work of men, but his work. A disperser comes up; men would be satisfied with the capture (cf. Obadiah) [*Lange*].

Neither equipment, nor the appearance of assembled power (ver. 2), nor capacity of hasty movement and vehement and varied activity (ver. 5) achieves victory in the battles of the kingdom of God: where God stands, there victory comes [*Lange*].

Thus ver. 3 describes the attack; ver. 4 the defence; the two first clauses of ver. 5 the defence, the two last the attack [*Pusey*].

Ver. 5. If kings rely more upon their heroes and armies than upon God, they must become discouraged and flee before their enemies [*Lange*].

Ver. 6. *The palace dissolved.* The prophet unites the beginning and the end. The river gates were opened; what had been the fence against the enemy became an entrance for them: with the river there poured in also the tide of the people of the enemy. The *palace*, then the imperial abode, the centre of the empire, embellished with the history of its triumphs, sank, was *dissolved*, and ceased to be. It is not a physical loosening of the sun-dried bricks by the stream which would usually flow harmless by; but the dissolution of the empire itself [*Pusey*].

Nahum predicted the destruction of the city in its grandeur and prosperity. Hence learn: 1. To adore the *providence* of God in giving an exact and particular account of the siege. 2. To fear the *power* of God in collecting and employing such terrible forces to execute his will. 3. To *forsake sin*, lest we should be humbled and destroyed by the judgments of God.

HOMILETICS.

The Flight of the Inhabitants and the Plunder of the City.—*Verses* 8—10.

Nineveh was a wealthy and populous city. Like a pool of water in multitude of men, but nothing could defend it.

I. The disgraceful flight. "Yet they shall flee away." 1. *The people lost courage.* Effeminacy and lust beget weakness. God can dishearten the strongest and most courageous. Patriotism and confidence flee apace, and men are helpless as the reed when he pursues. 2. *The people fled away.* Panic seized them. Deaf to the call of a few leaders, none looked back, took a stand, or stopped in the flight. At Waterloo, Napoleon, observing the recoil of his columns and the confusion of all around him, cried out, "All is lost, save who can." In Nineveh the discomfiture and flight were complete. In the day of judgment none can save themselves by flight. "The flight shall perish from the swift." II. The extensive plunder. Enormous wealth was treasured up in the city. Its reputation as a commercial city rivalled Tyre (Ezek. xxvii. 23). Immense riches were acquired also by predatory war and taxes levied to the utmost degree. 1. *Its gold and silver*

were taken. "Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold." Riches cannot deliver in the day of wrath. They rather tempt and entice the spoiler. Small articles of value have been found in the ruins of Nineveh, but no gold nor silver. "When thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled." 2. *Its pleasant furniture was taken.* "Glory out of all the pleasant furniture." Everything considered costly, vessels of desire, treasures and utensils that yielded glory and reputation, were carried away. "The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just." 3. *Its desolation was complete.* "She is empty, and void, and waste." (*a*) *The city itself was destroyed.* Worldly wealth is vain, emptiness and poverty are the end of worldly greatness. Those who heap up silver as dust, and prepare raiment as clay, only provide for another's booty (Job xxvii. 17). (*b*) *The inhabitants were terror-struck.* Their *hearts* melted like wax before the fire, and their *knees* trembled in weakness. Pain seized their *loins*, and paleness covered their *faces*. A guilty conscience turns the most hardy into cowards. Nineveh's strength failed her in the day of need. The terror she had caused to Israel fell in just retribution upon herself, and this storehouse of plunder was utterly laid waste and destroyed.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 8. Wealth may be treasured up for ages, and increase in value and abundance, yet not be secure. Of *old*, yet flee away. Because God spares a people, and permits them to prosper in wickedness for a long time, it is no proof of security from coming judgment. Punishment is often sure and decreed; she shall be laid bare; they shall flee away.

Vers. 9, 10. Learn the folly of depending upon worldly resources. 1. Wealth may be taken away. 2. Numbers may fail and flee away. 3. The greatest defences may be levelled to the dust. "The greatest kingdoms finally come to nothing when the Lord inflicts upon them his penal judgments, and all their power is unable to quench and stop the fire of his wrath" [*Lange*].

Ver. 10. The horrors of a guilty conscience. 1. Desponding minds. 2. Extreme pain. 3. Visible tokens of approaching ruin. *The state of mind manifested in the attitudes of the body.* Natural men despair in adversity, sink in courage when robbed of their earthly goods. "It is certainly a great loss when one loses money and goods, but not so great as when the heart falls into despair [*Lange*]. First, *the heart*, the seat of courage, and resolve, and high purpose, *melteth;* then *the knees smite together*, tremble, shake under their frame; then *much pain is in all loins*, lit. "strong pains as of a woman in travail," writhing and doubling the whole body, and making it wholly powerless and unable to stand upright, shall bow the very loins, the seat of strength (Prov. xxxi. 17); and lastly, *the faces of them all gather blackness* (cf. Joel ii. 6), the fruit of extreme pain, and the token of approaching dissolution [*Pusey*]. Joy and sorrow will show themselves in the face as in a glass. Now if for a temporal mischief there is so great a consternation in wicked men, what shall we think there is in hell? [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

NINEVEH EFFACED.—*Verses* 11—13.

The Prophet, beholding the destruction in spirit as having already taken place, looks round for the site on which the mighty city once stood, and sees it no more. This is the meaning of the question in ver. 11. He describes it as the dwelling-place of lions. The point of comparison is the predatory lust of its rulers and their warriors, who crushed the nations like lions, plundering their treasures, and bringing them together in Nineveh [*Keil*].

I. Its site was obliterated. "Where is the dwelling of the lions," &c. Great

must be the desolation to call forth such an expression. Where indeed is the proud city? Its place was unknown for ages, and is only just discovered by the ruins which have been dug up. It was *secure*, the *dwelling* of the lions; *spacious walked;* and *wealthy*, the *feeding-place* of the young lions; but its battlements were destroyed and its glory departed. The dust of Nineveh is a witness for the truth of God, and a warning to the nations of the earth. "Assyria lies buried there with all its people; round about are their graves, all of them are slain and fallen by the sword; they have made their graves deep there below." **II. Its rulers were overcome.** Over 500 years this great city of God (cf. Jon. i. 3; iii. 2) was, under its powerful rulers, the terror of Western Asia. Dynasty after dynasty had transmitted its dreaded name to age after age. 1. *Its rulers were strong.* Like lions in power and purpose, bent on plunder and mischief. They were greedy, ravenous beasts, which could never be satisfied (Isa. lxvi. 11). 2. *Its rulers were a terror to others.* They tore others, and were not touched themselves. Exempt from fear, they were a dread to surrounding peoples, "and none made them afraid." But the Lord of hosts was against them, and raised up one stronger than they. "The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant." **III. Its resources were destroyed.** Ver. 13 expresses her complete destruction. 1. *Its military defences were destroyed.* "I will burn her chariots in the smoke." Their chariots remarkable for speed and lightness, their horses noted for fierceness and power, were fuel for the fire. All their warlike preparations vanished into smoke, and not a brand was plucked from the burning. 2. *Their offspring were cut off.* "The sword shall devour thy young lions." The flower of youth, their hope for the future, was cut down. The whole race of oppressors was taken away. God in justice may cut off those whom we seek to enrich, and for whom we are so anxious to provide. 3. *Their wealth was taken away.* "I will cut off thy prey from the earth." The immense booty they had gathered by fraud and violence was robbed by the enemy. 4. *Their agents were no longer seen.* "The voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard." Emissaries exacting tribute or conveying the edicts of the king; heralds and delegates travelling the provinces; messengers, uttering blasphemy and publishing victory, "should no more be heard upon the mountains of Israel." God had hushed them to silence, and the stillness of death prevailed. **IV. Its destiny was sealed.** "Behold, I come," are words which seal and confirm the threat. God had endured long, but came at last. The city was captured and destroyed. Its ruins have never been revived, and Moslem tribes rear their hamlets on its barren stones. "Desolation meets desolation," says Layard; "a feeling of awe succeeds to wonder, for there is nothing to relieve the mind; to lead to hope, or to tell of what has gone by. These high mounds of Assyria made a deeper impression upon me, gave rise to more serious thought and more earnest reflection, than either the temples of Baalbec or the theatres of Ionia."

Conquerors proud, to seal her doom,
Swept her to ruin's all-engulfing tomb.
Long ages past, and turf o'ergrew the walls,
And silence reigned in Ninus' buried halls.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 11, 12. *The lions.* Oppression is brutish conduct. It turns palaces into dens, and princes into lions. "As a roaring lion and a raging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people." Unrighteous gain is a risky bargain. "The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them."

Ver. 13. God against the sinner. 1. God is declared to be against him. "*Behold,*" *&c.* 2. God has power to fulfil his threats. "The *Lord* of *Hosts.*"

3. The results will be unmistakeable if the opposition continues. Seek to be reconciled to God. From the whole chapter we may learn—1. *God's hand in destructive warfare.* The wealth and haughty bearing of Nineveh drew forth the conquering army. The passions and efforts of men were concerned, but they only performed the pleasure of the Most High. 2. *The vanity of human greatness.* Heaps of gold and silver are not real possessions. A royal palace and an imperial throne will crumble into dust. "Empty and void and waste," may be inscribed on every earthly glory.

"They are but beggars that can count their wealth" [*Shakespeare*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1, 2. *Dasher in pieces.* Demetrius was surnamed Poliorcestes, the destroyer of cities; Attilas called himself Orbis flagellum, the scourge of the world. Julius Cæsar was Fulmen belli, the thunderbolt of war; he had taken in his time a thousand towns, conquered three hundred nations, took prisoners one million of men, and slain as many. These were dissipatores indeed, and dashers in pieces, rods of God's wrath; and this they took to be a main piece of their glory [*Trapp*].

Vers. 3, 4. *Chariots* were objects of great interest. "Their charioteers had an air of perfect fearlessness; they dashed along as if caring for nothing, but resolved upon crushing everything. These declarations are perfectly accurate, and cannot be more evident than the sculptures and bas-reliefs of Nineveh have shown them to be. Their chariots are represented, covered with costly decorations and Sabean symbols; and their horses are exhibited in almost every variety of attitude—rearing, running and rushing—exactly as we should have supposed them to be, after reading that which is said of them in the prophecies."

The siege was no easy task. History declares that the king, at the approach of the enemy, collected all his active forces—that the besieging army was three times severely defeated, and that the Medes could only be held with great difficulty to the work. The Assyrians abandoned themselves to negligent rejoicing in the camps before the gates on account of victory, but were attacked in the night and driven back to the walls. Salæmenes, brother-in-law to the king, who had resigned the command to him, was driven into the Tigris (cf. ch. iii. 3); but the city was still uninjured, and the enemy encamped in vain before the gates. In the spring of the third year other powers interfered. The river became "an enemy to the city" (cf. ii. 7; i. 8—10). The inundation occurred suddenly, and violently broke down in one night the walls on the river. The king despaired of his life, and having sent his family to the north, shut himself up with all his treasures, and burned himself in the royal citadel. Immense booty was carried away. The city was plundered, sacked, and set on fire [*Lange*, Introduction to Nahum].

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The prophet resumes his description of the siege. **Blood**] Drops of blood shed in murder [*Keil*]. **Lies**] Vain promises of help. **Depart.**] Ceases not to plunder. **2. Noise**] In the charges of war-cars. "This passage is unrivalled by any other, either in sacred or profane literature" [*Hend.*]. Riders dash along, the flame of the sword, the flash of the lance, and the multitude of the slain, depict the attack and its consequences. **4. Whoredoms**] The reason of the punishment; not idolatry but selfishness, which under the guise of love sought the gratification of lust: the crafty policy to ensnare other States. **Selleth**] *i. e.* rob nations of liberty, bring them into bondage or make them tributary (Deut. xxxii. 30: Jud. ii. 14). **5. Discover**] Language suggested by preceding metaphor of an harlot; referring to the custom of stripping captives, male and female, and exposing

them to nakedness and insult. **6. Gazing-stock**] A warning to others (Ezek. xxviii. 17). **7.**] She will be an object of disgust, none will pity the devastated city, for her doom is deserved. **8.**] She will share the fate of *No-Amon*, a royal city of Egypt, populous, sacred, and strong (Ezek. xxx. 14, 15: Jer. xlvi. 25), like Nineveh well situated, protected by waters on every side. **9.**] Allies numerous and powerful, yet No (Thebes) could not preserve herself. **10.**] Its inhabitants subjected to all the cruelties and indignities generally inflicted upon conquered people. **11. Drunken**] with the cup of Divine anger. A refuge from the enemy sought and not found in other nations. **12. Strongholds**] All the fortifications will be easily taken, like ripe figs they will fall into the mouth of the gatherer (cf. Is. xxviii. 4: Rev. vi. 13). **13. Women**] Effeminate and timid, or weak and unable to offer resistance (cf. Is. xix. 6: Jer. l. 37). **14. Draw**] for a long-continued siege, improve fortifications, put the kiln in order for burning bricks. **15. Make**] Multiply thyself, like the largest and most formidable locusts. **16.**] Traders and merchants increased innumerable as the stars, but fire and sword would devour all. **17. Crowned**] rulers or vassal princes which encamp in the cold and flee away in the sun. "The wings of locusts become stiffened in the cold; but as soon as the warm rays of the sun break through the clouds, they recover animation and fly away." **18. Shepherds**] Princes and great men, royal counsellors and deputies upon whom the government devolved. **Sleep**] in death. **People**] The flock scattered and perished (cf. Num. xxvii. 17: 1 Kings xxii. 17). **19. Healing**] Softening, or anointing, no cure. **Bruise**] Fracture or ruin (Prov. xvi. 18: Lam. ii. 11).

HOMILETICS.

GREAT WICKEDNESS.—*Verse* 1.

The prophet in this chapter repeats and confirms the total ruin of Nineveh, because of cruel oppression and blood. The wickedness of the city is set forth in terrible aspects.

I. Cruel murder. "The bloody city." Its prosperity was tainted with blood. Unrighteous war, oppression of the poor, and manifold bloodshedding are the indictment. "Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!" **II. Treacherous dealing.** "It is all full of lies and robbery." *Lies* in word and act. Deceit with man, and hyprocrisy before God. *Robbery* linked with lies, secret treachery and open violence. *Full* of wickedness. Integrity and truth banished from them, and none upright for whose sake God might spare the city. **III. Constant rapine.** "The prey departeth not." She never ceased, but continued to make a prey upon others. They neither repented nor grew weary of iniquity. Avarice grew more intense, lusts were daily fed, and like a beast they tore in pieces and greedily fed upon their prey. God specially marks and denounces woe upon those who persevere in wicked courses. "Arise, go to Nineveh that great city, and cry against it: for their wickedness is come up before me."—

> "Who, stung by glory, rave and bound away,
> The world their field and humankind their prey" [*Young*].

GREAT JUDGMENTS AND GREAT SINS.—*Verses* 2—4.

The sentence is enlarged, and the woe explained. Terrible are the preparations of the enemy, and the noise of chariots and horsemen sounds already in the ears. The city is filled with the dead, and the judgments of God are severe.

I. Great sins. "Because of the multitude of the whoredoms," &c. 1. *Bewitching other nations.* "The mistress of witchcraft." As harlots try to dement and ensnare by incantations, so Nineveh sought to draw others to her by subtle machinations. The love of gain acts on multitudes like "witchcraft." They seduce others, hunt after men in excessive lust, and lead them into idolatry and estrangement from God. 2. *Enslaving other nations.* "That selleth nations." They have no scruples in the use of unlawful means to get power and subdue others beneath their feet. Art and politics, religion and wealth, were used to make the city great and universal. 3. *Selfish aggrandizement.* All her skill and artifice in ill-doing were employed to gratify the desire of supremacy. Selfishness is often dressed in love to accomplish its own ends. Religion is made subservient to worldly aims; devilish arts enslave man and offend God. Domestic sanctities are violated, the rights of men are

trampled down, and justice is outraged. "Such ambition," says Sir Walter Scott, "breaks the ties of blood, forgets the obligations of manhood." **II. Great judgments.** Men may glory in skill, increase in power, and pursue wickedness, but God will have a reckoning with them. "*Because* of the multitude," &c. 1. *Judgments are prepared.* "The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses," &c. Military preparations are great: a formidable army is advancing against the city with irresistible speed and power. The judgments of God are (*a*) numerous, (*b*) ready for execution, and (*c*) will come with overwhelming speed. When sins are small, God is often patient and long-suffering; but when they become notorious and we continue in them, then God will punish them. 2. *Judgments experienced.* Before, all was beautiful and arranged to allure in the city, but now how different the scene! Everything fills the ear with terror, and the heart with sadness. (1) *The dead innumerable.* Death follows death in rapid succession, "and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcases." (2) *The dead in every form.* They are *slain*, and the bodies are *carcases, corpses*, an oppressive number, without end. (3) *The dead causing the living to stumble.* So great the multitude of those who perish, that they lie, a hindrance in every street. "They stumble upon their corpses"—sad scene! an awful warning to others. "To fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have slain in mine anger and in my fury, and for all whose wickedness I have hid my face from this city" (Jer. xxxiii. 5).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *Filled with deceit.* Great cities often great centres of wickedness. Notice, 1. *The wickedness*, (*a*) deceit, (*b*) violence, and (*c*) blood. God would not have destroyed it on account of idolatry or he would not have sent Jonah: his justice waited for the outbreak of greater violence and impious deeds. 2. *The degree of this wickedness.* "It is all full of lies." "She is wholly made up of fraud and falsehood, mendaciorum loquacissima; no truth in her private contracts, no trust in her public transactions and capitulations with other nations; be they never so solemnly confirmed, yet had they no longer force with them than stood with their own profit" [*Trapp*].

Ver. 2. Here we have, 1. *The attack.* Eager and furious. Noise of whip, rattling of wheels, &c. 2. *The results of the attack.* Tremendous slaughter, dead bodies everywhere. "Let those," says an old writer, "that refuse to hear God's sweet words fear lest they be forced to hear the noise of the whip, the rattling of the wheels, &c. (Ps. vii. 12, 13: Luke xix. 42—44: Prov. i. 24). The enemy is sent to revenge the quarrel of God's covenant; the red horse is at the heels of the white" (Rev. vi. 4).

Ver. 4. *The mistress of witchcrafts.* The Hebrew not only indicates the subtlety, but the ease by which the great metropolis made itself the centre of nations. 1. *The dominion.* "Mistress," meaning power, control, and dominion. 2. *The method of gaining the dominion.* "Witchcraft." Treacherous friendships, and allurements, to ensnare and bind to herself other nations. She decked herself like a prostitute to entice from God into sin. But she will lose empire and inhabitants, and become like a widow destitute of children. "These two things shall come to thee in a moment, in one day—the loss of children and widowhood: they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries," &c. (Is. xlvii. 9—12).

HOMILETICS.

Retributive Punishment.—*Verses* 5—7.

Nineveh is represented in her virgin splendour, and her punishment under the figure of that which is disgraceful to a woman (cf. Is. xlvii. 3, and Hab. ii. 10).

God is against her, and her shame shall correspond to her conduct. As she uncovered others, so shall she be uncovered.

I. She will be exposed to nakedness and shame. "I will discover thy skirts upon thy face." Her long flowing robes, which were part of her pomp and dignity, but which veiled her misdeeds and pride, shall be lifted up as high as possible (Jer. xiii. 22). She will be treated as a harlot, and stripped of her glory and defence. Her *face* shall blush in fear, and the consciousness of guilt will be read in her features. Nations shall see her nakedness, avoid and despise her. The same means will be taken to display her lewdness that she used to commit it. "I will even gather them round about against thee, will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness." **II. She will be disgraced and insulted.** As infamous harlots will she be treated. 1. *Made a gazing-stock to men.* "I will set thee as a gazing-stock." The city once feared and renowned shall become a warning to others, and exposed to public infamy. "I will cast thee to the ground; before kings will I give thee, for them to gaze upon thee." 2. *Treated with contempt by God himself.* "I will cast abominable filth upon thee." She had done abominable things before God (Jer. xiii. 27), which she had forgotten, but God will punish her with abominable things. Filth shall be cast upon her and she will be made vile. **III. She will be unpitied and forsaken.** "It shall come to pass that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee." She would be set to be gazed at, and the effects on those who gaze are described. 1. *Unpitied.* "Who will bemoan her?" There will be none to comfort and relieve her. Unwept and unhonoured, she will fall into the grave. Human misery excites pity, but none pay Nineveh the tribute of sympathy. Those who show no pity to others will find none for themselves. 2. *Forsaken.* She had measured friendship by profit, and forsaken those who did not trust in her. Now she is repayed, and becomes a terror to all round about her. Such will be the portion of all who disregard God and live for self. They will be stripped of all adornments, bereft of all comfort, and thrown into eternal misery. "These two things are come unto thee; who shall be sorry for thee?—desolation and destruction, and the famine, and the sword; by whom shall I comfort thee?"

The Destruction of Some a Warning to Others.—*Verses* 8—10.

There is no hope for Nineveh, for No-Amon was strong by nature and art, head of many confederate nations; yet was captured and destroyed. The city cannot protect herself. Destruction is sure. Notice how one support after another is taken away.

I. Natural defences will not avail. No was strongly fortified by nature and art. She "was situate among the rivers." The Nile watered her fields and guarded her walls. Her rampart was the sea. She was considered impregnable. No was one of the grandest and most magnificent cities of antiquity. But no situation can shield from God's anger. Nations may be secluded from others and encircled by walls and seas, but God can overturn them. **II. Large populations will not avail.** "Populous No." It was a great centre for corn and merchandise, and attracted many people. It supplied the country round about with necessaries. But it was no better or safer on account of its numerous inhabitants. "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host." **III. Confederate nations will not avail.** No's allies were numerous and strong. Her military resources and Egyptian auxiliaries were immense. Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength. Put and Lubim were ready to help. But vast armies fail to maintain empires against the decree of God. "The strongest battalions melt like snow-flakes when God is against them." The leagured might of earth is no match for the power of heaven. "The Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, saith; Behold, I will punish the multitude of No, and Pharaoh, and Egypt, with their gods and their kings," &c. (Jer. xlvi. 25, 26).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 8. The ruined cities of antiquity a warning to Christendom. Carthage, Nineveh, and Jerusalem (cf. Matt. xi. 24: Luke x. 12, 13). Warnings proportioned to sins and privileges.

"It will help to keep us in holy fear of the judgments of God," says an old author, "to consider that we are not better than those that have fallen under those judgments before us."

Ver. 9. The weakness of all human power before God. The fallacy of trusting in numbers contrasted with faith in God. "Lit. *Egypt* was *strength*, and *Ethiopia*, *boundless*. He sets forth first the imperial might of No: then her strength from foreign, subdued power. The capital is a sort of impersonation of the might of the State; No, of Egypt, as Nineveh, of Assyria. When the head was cut off, or the heart ceased to beat, all was lost. The might of Egypt and Ethiopia was the might of No, concentrated in her. They were *strength*, and that strength unmeasured by any human standard. *Boundless* was the *strength* which Nineveh had subdued: *boundless* the *store* (2—10) which she had accumulated for the spoiler; *boundless* the carcases of her slain" [*Pusey*].

Vers. 8—10. 1. *How firm the standing of Nineveh.* Surrounded by water, defended by inner and outer walls, endless in wealth, and powerful in confederacies. 2. *How fatal the fall of Nineveh.* (1) Overcome notwithstanding might. "Yet was she carried away." She became an exile, and her people carried into captivity with heathen barbarities. (2) All hope of recovery destroyed. (*a*) Young children were dashed in pieces by a merciless conqueror. (*b*) Noble men were distributed by lot. "They cast lots for her honourable men," &c. No pity was shown. (*c*) Officials, men of state, were treated like slaves. "All her great men were bound in chains" (cf. Ezek. xiii. 14—16).

HOMILETICS.

THE FATE OF SOME WORSE THAN THAT OF OTHERS.—*Verses* 10—13.

No-Amon suffered greatly, but Nineveh will suffer more. "Thou also shalt be drunken" with the cup of God's wrath. The greatness of thy anguish shall deprive thee of reason and strength, and stupefy thee like death.

I. The punishment is a Divine judgment. God acts by the same unchanging law in all ages and to all nations. No and Nineveh must alike suffer for sins. 1. *Punishment in great degree.* Not a mere taste, but *drunken.* They drink till overwhelmed. The most prudent will lose judgment, and act like a drunken man. "Drink ye, and be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you." 2. *Punishment without refuge.* Help shall be sought in vain from others. No stronghold from the enemy. If God forsake, no help can be found in man. In time of justice it is too late to cry for mercy. 3. *Punishment ending in ruin.* "Thou shalt be hid." The city once so proud and glorious was buried beneath the mounds, hidden as in a tomb; covered out of sight, and has only lately been discovered. In unearthing Nineveh from its ruins, we read a tale of splendour and power, of cruelty and blood, of sin and retribution. **II. The punishment is easily inflicted.** The two figures are strikingly expressive of the extreme ease with which they are overcome. 1. *Their valiant men are faint-hearted.* "Behold, the people in the midst of thee are women." Stone-walls should make cowards brave. But in *the midst*, in the very centre, there is weakness and fear. Warriors, whom no toil wearied and no danger daunted, one and all become helpless as women. Where sin dwells there is no power to resist. When God takes the mettle out of men, the strongest faint away. "The mighty men of Babylon have forborne to fight, they have remained in their holds; their might

hath failed; they became as women" (Jer. li. 30; l. 37: Is. xix. 16). 2. *Every avenue opens to the enemy.* "The gates of thy land," the fortified passes and natural barriers on the hills, do not check the invader. Passes have been held by devoted men against countless multitudes (Thermopylæ), but the whole would be open to the enemy, and frontier garrisons would pass away as if consumed by fire. 3. *Strongholds would be easily taken.* Weak are fortifications against Divine wrath; trees which tremble in the breeze, they only need the breath of God. Wealth and position, self-righteousness and human wisdom, however great and relied upon, are false towers, and will give no refuge at last (Prov. xviii. 10). The judgment of God will shatter them and sweep them all away. 4. *Everything is ripe for destruction.* "Like fig-trees with the first ripe figs." They are eagerly sought after, ready to fall by the slightest effort, and "will drop into the mouth of the eater." Without cost or sacrifice the enemy will take the city. The first assault would be successful. What a fearful moral condition, to ripen so easily for the judgment of God. "The wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation."

THE LAST HOPE DESTROYED.—*Verses* 14—18.

The city is laden with guilt, but relies still upon its fortifications and numerical strength of population. The last prop is cut down. There is no hope left. Though provisioned within and strongly defended without, Nineveh must fall, and great will be the fall.

I. **Inward provisions will waste away.** "Draw the waters for the siege, go into clay, and tread the mortar," &c. *Water*, necessary for siege and the support of life, must be procured. She must furnish herself with all manner of provisions to keep her from surrender or starvation. *Clay* must be prepared, and the kilns made ready for repairing and building strongholds. The conquering nation were to toil and do the work of slaves. But all would be in vain. The fire would devour her bulwarks, and the sword her population. Swift will be the ruin of all who number houses and fortify walls, "but have not looked to the maker thereof, nor have not respected him that fashioned them" (Is. xxii. 10, 11). II. **Outward defences will be destroyed.** "There shall the fire devour thee." *There*, in the very centre of their toil and vast preparations, where the greatest security was relied upon, was the devouring fire. What was considered strongest was destroyed with ease, like locusts eating up the tender grass. Singly, and as a whole, the judgments of God will find men out. "Evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him." III. **Immense numbers will fall away.** "Make thyself many as the cankerworm." Make thyself numerous and oppressive as locusts, gather from all quarters men to help, and seek to become mighty in multitudes, yet the foe will consume like creatures which lick up all before them. 1. *Wealthy merchants will not defend.* Though multiplied above the stars of heaven, and trafficking in despotism, they cannot lay up in store against the wrath of God. Money is the sinews of war, but will not shelter from the consequences of sin. Prosperity suddenly changes into adversity. "The cankerworm spoileth and fleeth away." 2. *Warlike soldiers will not defend.* The captains, confederates, and commanders of the army, will melt away, perish like dew before the rising sun. They are but grasshoppers, mighty as they are. "All flesh is grass." 3. *Ruling princes will not defend.* "Thy crowned heads are as the locusts," &c. They subside into quietness in the calamity of the night, and continue their flight in the morning. They are "torpid in the cold and fly in the heat." Officers of state and subordinate chiefs will be completely annihilated. "Their place is not known where they are." 4. *Great counsellors will not defend.* The shepherds *slumber* in listlessness and excess; sink into torpor and stupidity. The nobles and greatest politicians were benighted and bereft of wisdom. "At thy

rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep." Valiant men would dwell in *the dust*, and be buried in silence. God can soon strip a nation of its great ones, and lay its honour in the dust. Where are they when *he* deals with them? "Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds, yet he shall perish for ever: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he? He shall fly away, as a dream, and shall not be found: neither shall his place any more behold him."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 14. *Clay.* Mankind still, with mire and clay, build themselves Babels. *They go into clay*, and become themselves earthly like the mire they steep themselves in. They make themselves strong, as though they thought that their houses would continue for ever. God's wrath descends, and eats up like a cankerworm [*Pusey*].

Vers. 14, 15. 1. *Man by his endeavours cannot avert the judgments of God.* Nineveh prepared and provisioned herself, but fell after all. 2. *Man may presume upon carnal means until he is ruined.* Lawful means are necessary, but we must not rely upon them for security. If God be against us no other help can relieve. "Running into God is the only best way to escape him. As to close and get in with him that would strike you doth avoid the blow" [*Trapp*].

Ver. 15. The prophet gives in three words the whole history of Nineveh, its beginning and its end. He had before foretold its destruction, though it should be oppressive as the locust: he had spoken of its commercial wealth; he adds to this, that other source of its wealth, its despoiling warfares and their issue. The heathen conqueror rehearsed his victory, "I came, saw, conquered." The prophet goes farther, as the issue of all human conquest, "I disappeared" [*Pusey*].

Vers. 15, 16. 1. The mightiest of earth are as locusts before him (cf. Is. xl. 22). 2. The more obstinately they resist, the more irresistible is the judgment. 3. The larger and more numerous they are, the more utterly will they be destroyed [*Lange*].

Ver. 17. *Cowardly rulers.* 1. Sheltering for advantage. In the cold day, camping in the hedges, but fleeing away in sunshine. 2. Living only to eat. They are wasters merely, like locusts devouring everything before them. 3. Deserting when they should help, an emblem this of the world's friendship. Men get what they can out of others, and then bid them farewell in distress. Treacherous friendships abound everywhere.

Dust. All flesh perishes, but the word of God endures for ever [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

Slumbering Shepherds and Scattered Flocks.—*Verse* 18.

I. Shepherds unworthy in their character. They are destitute of counsel; base and idle; careful only for their own profit and safety, and not for the interests of the flock. Efficiency depends upon character in the ministry. Good shepherds care for the sheep, feed and defend them. "The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep." **II. Shepherds negligent in their duty.** They sleep and consult their own ease, instead of defending their city and country. Indolence, self-indulgence, and fickleness doth eat like a canker into the ministry of some. Our duties demand entire devotedness of mind and heart. Ministers desecrate their high calling, when they enter it for ease or commercial advantage. Diligence is required in study, visitation, and preaching. "Woe to the idol-shepherd (one wishing to be his own idol and the idol of his flock) that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye." **III. Shepherds**

cursed in their efforts. The flock is exposed and scattered, like sheep upon the mountains. They have none to care for them, consequently get lost. They are lost for ever. "No man gathereth them." Terrible ruin! Fearful responsibility somewhere!

> "I am shepherd to another man,
> And do not sheer the fleece that I graze" [*Shakspeare*].

IRRETRIEVABLE RUIN.—*Verse* 19.

Deliverance is utterly hopeless. The prophet declares the end of a nation which ruled with a rod of iron, and oppressed with unmitigated cruelty.

I. Nineveh cruel will be repaid for her cruelty. "For upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?" Monuments and inscriptions prove the pitiless cruelty of Assyria. In sculptures are rows of impaled prisoners, whose eyes were put out, and whose lips were fastened by rings. God had long borne this oppression, but now guilt must be punished. Judgment must fall, and there is not the least hope of recovery. Cruelty and oppression will be rewarded in their own coin. **II. Nineveh ruined will be a joy to others.** "All that hear the bruit of thee shall clap their hands over thee." 1. This joy is *great.* It is exultation, clapping of hands. 2. This joy is *universal. All,* for cruelty was extensive, and none can grieve at its termination. The fall of the oppressor is the triumph of the oppressed. **III. Nineveh destroyed will never be restored.** There is neither comfort in the affliction nor recovery from it. *The wound* is incurable. "There is no healing of thy bruise." There is none *to help.* She had made no friends in her policy, displayed no signs of repentance in her guilt. Now she must perish without pity and without help. The ruin is total and irretrievable. "How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers," &c. (Is. xiv. 4—7).

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VII.

Vers. 8—10. *No-Ammon.* Thebes was renowned for its numerous gates and vast extent. Its remaining ruins describe a circuit of twenty-seven miles [*Henderson*]. There is no definite historical account of its capture by Assyrians. But from brief notices in Scripture, we have hints of a struggle for supremacy between Assyria and Egypt (cf. 2 Kings xvii. 4). See Smith's *Dict. of the Bible,* article *Thebes;* and Keil on vers. 8—10.

Vers. 11—19. Nahum's prophecy of the future destruction of Nineveh was fulfilled by the Medes and Babylonians (cf. ch. ii. 1); and according to his prediction, the vast power of Nineveh completely vanished, and its glory was utterly eclipsed, so that in the year B.C. 401, Xenophon passed by the site without learning its name (*Xen.* Anab. iii. 4—7). Four hundred years afterwards a small fortress was standing on the site, to guard the passage of the river Tigris (*Tacitus,* Ann. xii. 13), and opposite to it, on the west bank of the Tigris, has arisen the city of Mosul. In the year 1776, Niebuhr visited the spot, and supposed that what were the heaps of ruins of Nineveh, were natural undulations in the soil (See *Rawlinson,* i. 326). In more modern times it has been explored by Botta, the French Consul (in 1842), and more recently by Layard and others, who have brought to light those gigantic remains of palaces, statues, and other monuments which testify to the ancient grandeur of Nineveh, and those annalistic inscriptions which confirm the veracity of the prophecies of Nahum and of Isaiah, and of the historical narrative of Holy Scripture: and bear witness to the Divine foreknowledge of the Holy Ghost who speaks in it; to whom with the Father and the Son, Three Persons and one God, be honour and glory now and for evermore. Amen [*Wordsworth*].

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

HABAKKUK.

INTRODUCTION.

THE PROPHET. We have nothing certain, but much apocryphal, concerning the life of Habakkuk. Delitzsch thinks that he was connected with the service of the temple, and belonged to the tribe of Levi. In his writings we find his name and the notice that he was a prophet.

THE DATE. There is considerable difference of opinion on this point. Some say in the first years of Manasseh, and others that he prophesied in the reign of Jehoiachin, about 608—604 B. C. Delitzsch fixes the twelfth or thirteenth year of Josiah's reign, B. C. 630 or 629. "It is evident from the constant use of the *future* tense in speaking of the Chaldean desolations (i. 5, 6, 12), that the prophet must have written before the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, which rendered Jehoiakim tributary to the king of Babylon (2 Kings xxiv. 1), B. C. 606, yet it is equally clear from ch. ii. 3, that the prophecy did not long precede the fulfilment; and as there seem to be no references to the reigns of Josiah or Jehoahaz (B. C. 609), and as the notices of the corruption of the period agree with the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, we cannot be far astray in assigning B. C. 608 as the appropriate date of this Book."

THE CONTENTS. "The prophecy of Habakkuk is clothed in a dramatic form, man questioning and complaining, God answering with threatening. It announces, as nearest of all, the impending fearful judgment by the instrumentality of the Chaldeans on the theocracy because of its prevailing moral corruption (ch. i.); and next to this, in a fivefold woe, the downfall of this arrogant, violent, God-forgetting and idolatrous offender (ch. ii.); and it concludes with the answer of the believing Church to this twofold Divine revelation—that is to say, with a prophetico-lyric echo of the impressions and feelings produced in the prophet's mind" [*Keil*]. "The prominent vices of the Chaldean character, as delineated in i. 5—11, are made the subjects of separate denunciations: their insatiable ambition (ii. 6—8), their covetousness (ii. 9—11), cruelty (ii. 12—14), drunkenness (ii. 15—17), and idolatry (ii. 18—20) The whole concludes with a magnificent psalm in ch. iii., 'Habakkuk's

Pindaric Ode' (Ewald), a composition unrivalled for boldness of conception, sublimity of thought, and majesty of diction."

THE STYLE. In point of general style, Habakkuk is universally allowed to occupy a very distinguished place among the Hebrew prophets, and is surpassed by none of them in dignity and sublimity. Whatever he may occasionally have in common with previous writers he works up in his own peculiar manner, and is evidently no servile copyist or imitator. His figures are well chosen, and fully carried out. His expressions are bold and animated; his descriptions graphic and pointed. The parallelisms are for the most part regular and complete. The lyric ode contained in chapter iii. is justly esteemed one of the most splendid and magnificent within the whole compass of Hebrew poetry [*Henderson*]. "His figures are great," says one, "happily chosen, and properly drawn out. His denunciations are terrible, his derision bitter, his consolation cheering. Instances occur of borrowed ideas (iii. 19: comp. Ps. xviii. 34; ii. 6: comp. Isa. xiv. 7; ii. 14: comp. Isa. xi. 9); but he makes them his own in drawing them out in his peculiar manner. With all the boldness and fervour of his imagination, his language is pure and his verse melodious." The Book completes the series of writings threatening judgments upon particular countries and cities opposed to God and his people. Obadiah prophesied against Edom, Jonah and Nahum against Nineveh, and Habakkuk against Babylon. The prophet looks back to the victories of Egypt, derives hope for the future, and closes with a sublime expression of faith in God. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom," the believer may "rejoice in the Lord." The darker the outward circumstances, the greater the succour from God.

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Burden**] (cf. Nah. i. 1). **2. How**] A complaint; wickedness continued long, and God did not interfere. **3. Why**] dost thou behold violence without checking it? some; the prophet is permitted to behold iniquity, and this is the reason for his cry. Since God the Holy One will not look upon it in Israel (Num. xxiii. 21), why should his servant? **Raise**] A litigious spirit prevailed; none were quietly permitted to enjoy their rights. All was seized by force or perversion of law. **4. Therefore**] Because crimes are unpunished. **Slacked**] Lit. chilled; neither secures obedience nor influence. The word means to relax, to lose strength and vital energy. **Forth**] Lit. for a permanence, *i. e.* for ever, as in many other passages, *e. g.* (Ps. xiii. 2: Is. xiii. 20) [cf. *Keil*]. **Wrong**] Unrighteous verdicts given, and godless men encircle the good. **5—11**]. God's answer to the complaint. **Behold**] prophet and people. God is about to act, and they will be terrified at its results (cf. Acts xiii. 41). **6. Raise**] To make incursions and at length conquer Judea (cf. 2 Kings xxiv. and xxv.). **Bitter**] *i. e.* cruel (Jer. l. 42: cf. marg. Jud. xviii. 25: 2 Sam. xvii. 8). **Hasty**] Rash and impetuous. **7. Their**] As they had raised themselves to this dignity so they would permit none to share in their counsels and determinations, but would act in the most arbitrary manner [*Henderson*]. **8. Leopards**] which leap seventeen or eighteen feet at a spring. **Evening wolves**] fasting all day, are keen in hunger and commit ravages on the flocks at night (Gen. xlix. 27: Jer. v. 6). The eagerness of cavalry to plunder would be so great that fatigue in the march would be nothing. Like the flight of an **eagle**] would they rush along (cf. Jer. iv. 13; xlviii. 40, and Lam. iv. 19). **9. Violence**] Not to administer justice. **Faces**] Presence. **Sup**] Swallow all before them. They pass along like a tempestuous wind. **Sand**] Prisoners gathered like dust by the simoom in the desert. **10. Scoff**] Resistance impossible and laughed at. **Heap**] Heap mounds of earth, according to the usual method of taking a fortress. **11. Then**] Elated by victory. **Change**] Lit. the wind passes by; the storm of violence like the wind sweeps over the land. Some refer it to the Chaldee nation, who change in mind, lose reason and moderation, and get proud. **Power**] is their god, or "(saying that) his power is his own, as one who is a god to himself" [*Grotius*]. *Henderson* gives—"Then it gaineth fresh spirit; it passeth onward and contracteth guilt, (saying,) Is this his power through his God." **12.**] God now vindicated in opposition to the boast of the enemy. God eternal and holy. **Die**] The Chaldeans will not destroy, only correct us. **Mighty**] Lit. Rock (Deut. xxxii. 4). **Thou**] They are only thy instruments. **13. Look**] inactively upon violence. **Deal**] Chaldeans once allies of the Jews, now violent oppressors (Isa. xxi. 2: xxiv. 16). **Right**] Bad as Jews were, they were much better than their enemies. **14.**] God made his people defenceless as the fish, left them in disorder, and without any to care for them. **15.**] The enemy easily catches them and exults in his success. **16. Sacrifice**] Idolize their military skill and power by which they gained success. Ancient Scythians offered yearly sacrifices to a sabre set up as a symbol of Mars [*Keil*]. **17. Therefore**] shall he **empty**] Lit. spread his net continually to destroy nations? Empty it and throw it in again for a fresh draught? It is implied that God will not permit such conduct to go unpunished, but the answer is reserved for the sequel.

HOMILETICS.

THE IMPORTUNATE PRAYER.—*Verse* 2.

The question asked is this: How long will God suffer his people to pray and still neglect to hear?

I. Until they see the plague of their own hearts. We may be astonished at the sins of others, and wonder at God's forbearance with them. But we forget that seeds of iniquity dwell in our own hearts and ripen in our own lives. We must feel our sinfulness and humble ourselves in the dust. "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" **II. Until they remove the hindrances which prevent the revival of his work.** Many stumbling-blocks are in the way. God can do nothing, and will not hear until they are removed. Ignorance, avarice, and slothfulness—all sins must be forsaken. We must be ready for every duty, be watchful lest by apathy, selfishness, and unbelief, we hinder the work of God. **III. Until they are willing to give God the glory.** We may pray for selfish ends, and withhold what is due to God. If in pride and success we claim the blessing, this will silence devotion. In prayer we often devour that which is holy,

and consecrate to our own use that which should be given to God (Prov. xx. 25). We desire to pamper our lusts and feed our own vanity. Wrong in spirit and purpose, we cry, "O Lord, how long?" Learn, 1. Why so many prayers fail. 2. To search your own hearts and purify yourselves before God. We may have earnestness and grief and yet fail. "Though you stretch out your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; and though you make many prayers, I will not hear you" [*Adapted*].

THE LAMENTABLE SIGHT.—*Verses* 2—4.

The prophet is permitted to see the great social and national evils of the Jews Unchecked and encouraged they grow in magnitude and number. He laments, in the name of all the godly among them, that their labours seem in vain, and he is forced to cry bitterly to God for relief.

I. The rights of property were disregarded. "For spoiling and violence are before me." They robbed one another, and took goods and lands from others. God himself divided the land, established the rights of property, by sacred law fixed bounds to every citizen, and taught him to be content with his lot. When violence of any kind breaks forth in a land its prosperity will soon fade away. 1. *This disregard was openly declared.* "Before me." The sins were deeply rooted, and those who committed them cared not who saw them. Modest at first, and afraid of discovery, sinners get bold in their wickedness, and openly and impudently avow them. 2. *God seemed to connive at this open disregard.* "How long shall I cry?" When God appears to overlook sin and to countenance it by permitting sinners to prosper, it grieves the heart and shakes the faith of good men. They cry to God for a sense of justice and right to prevail. "It is time for thee, Lord, to work." **II. The spirit of litigation prevailed.** "There are that raise up strife and contention." They were broken up into parties and factions that bit and devoured one another continually. Hatred stirs up strifes of all kinds, domestic, political, and religious. It sets man against his fellow-men and against his God. It disturbs society, promotes crime, and rouses the moral forces of the universe.

> "A Trinity there seems of principles,
> Which represent and rule created life,—
> The love of self, our fellows, and our God" [*Festus*].

III. The law had lost its authority. "Therefore the law is slacked," &c. The law of peace and charity and the law of Moses were set at nought. That which was the soul, the heart of political and religious life, ceased to act, like the pulse ceasing to beat. The state of a country may be judged from the authority and influence of its moral laws. 1. *The law was first disregarded.* Contempt for the word and authority of God opens the door for all wickedness. Neither threatening nor promise will then check in evil courses. 2. *Then the law was perverted.* "Judgment (justice) doth never go forth." (*a*) *Wrong decisions were given.* "Therefore wrong judgment proceedeth." The law was weak, the magistrates were corrupted, and there was no appeal against injustice. (*b*) *The ties of humanity were broken.* "The wicked doth compass about the righteous." The godly and innocent were surrounded and overcome by men turned into brutes. There was no security for persons or property. "Wickedness," says Bp. Taylor, "corrupts a man's reasonings, gives him false principles, and evil measuring of things." Well, therefore, did the prophet lament and cry to God. "My soul is also sore vexed; but thou, O Lord, how long?"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. 1. The *minister* of God in this prophecy. (1) By his *name*, Habakkuk. (2) By his *function*, the prophet. 2. The *manner* how he came by it, vision. 3. The *matter* of it, the burden. In which two questions are moved—(1) Why a burden; and (2), whose burden it is: a burden in respect

of the sin punished—of the punishment threatened—of the word of God threatening [*Marbury*].

Ver. 2. 1. What the prophet did. (1) He cried—with intense feeling, with great boldness, with long patience. (2) He cried to God in perplexity and grief, to stir him in apparent forgetfulness, and remind him of promised goodness. 2. The reason why he did it. For violence, strife, and war in domestic circles, injustice and oppression in courts of law, prevailing without check and without shame. 3. The success he had in doing it. (1) Thou wilt not hear. (2) Thou wilt not save. As not hearing is to be imputed to his mercy and patience, so his not saving is to be imputed either to his wisdom, putting his children to the trial of their faith by afflictions, or to his justice, making one of them, who have corrupted their ways, a rod to scourge the other, neither of them being as yet worth the saving till he had humbled them [Adapted from *Marbury*].

Vers. 2—4. 1. *Prevalent evils grieve the minds of God's servants.* Like David and Jeremiah, they weep at what they see. It makes them sigh. It is a burden to them. 2. *In their grief they fly to God for remedy.* They have faith in his power, providence, and purpose. They earnestly pray for justice and truth to prevail, for sin and wickedness to end. 3. *But in this course they do not always succeed.* God is not unmindful of his promise nor regardless of sin, but his people are not always delivered, and retribution not generally sent in the time they fix. God is holy and just: we are hasty and sinful. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments. Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?"

"Thy God hath said 'tis good for thee
To walk by faith and not by sight.
Take it on trust a little while,
Soon shalt thou read the mystery right,
In the bright sunshine of his smile" [*Keble*].

HOMILETICS.

The Wonderful Work.—*Verse* 5.

We have in these words an answer to the prophet's question. God is not an unconcerned spectator. He will vindicate his glory, and unexpected vengeance will fall upon the transgressors.

I. **The Work is Divine.** "I will work a work." God hears the complaints of his servants and remembers the taunt of the wicked, who cry, "Where is now their God?" God is the agent, though the heathen execute his judgments. He intends and he carries out; "work a work" in solemnity and power. "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." II. **The Work is nigh at hand.** "In your days." That generation would not pass before its accomplishment. Already the clouds blacken: the judgments may be suspended, but will break forth in startling thunder. This evil day cannot be put off. "It is nigh at hand, and not afar off." III. **The Work is wonderful.** "Wonder marvellously." In its nature it was not common, and in its effects it would be alarming. It would be strange and unparalleled among other nations and in their own history; spectators "among the heathen" would be surprised. "Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger?" (Deut. xxix. 24; xxviii. 37). IV. **The Work is incredible.** "You will not believe, though it be told you." The Jews did not credit the prediction of such alarming events; accustomed to confide in their cities (Is. xxxi. 1: Jer. vii. 4), and in Egyptian strength, they believed they were too powerful to be overcome. Men now will not believe in the judgments of God, though they loom in the threatenings. They are stupefied by sin, despise the Word of God, and go on until the curse falls upon them. Fearful is the punishment of those who presume upon security in evil. "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your

days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you." **V. The Work demands attention.** "Behold ye." The call is solemn and Divine. *Behold*, since language, the ministry of the prophet, and the complaints of the oppressed, will not do. God will try something else which shall be heard. "I will *work*," be patient and silent no longer. Behold, *the heathen* spectators of their sins will be instruments of their sorrows. This beholding must be attentive; *regard*, not mere gazing. The matter demands serious and earnest consideration. The overthrow of the Jews is a warning to all, a proof that sin will be fearfully punished if persisted in and the way of escape rejected. "Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to workers of iniquity?"

THE WONDERFUL WORK ACCOMPLISHED.—*Verses* 5—10.

We have now a particular description of the calamities to be inflicted. The Chaldeans, in their preparations and dispositions, in their victories and devastations, are exactly set forth, to confirm the truth and display the justice of God. The Jews are repaid in their own coin, and the dreadful judgments are inflicted.

I. In raising up a mighty nation. "For lo, I raise up the Chaldeans," &c. God never lacks instruments to prosecute his design. He can fetch them from afar and dispose them to his will, though already elated with victory and power. 1. *A nation naturally fierce.* "That bitter and hasty nation." They are cruel and impetuous, unmerciful, and resolute in their course. They spare no pains and show no pity. Hopeless is the condition of those who fall into their hands. "They hold the bow and the lance" to brandish before the foe; "they are cruel and will not show mercy." 2. *A nation terribly strong.* "They are terrible and dreadful." They are great in numbers, armed with Divine vengeance, and emboldened by former conquests. By the force of terror and the dread of death they gain submission. 3. *A nation blindly covetous.* They will not only overcome, but rob the land and "possess the dwellings that are not theirs." It is not merely to overturn others, they also take their possessions. But the dwellings "are not theirs" by right, only held while God pleases, and then lost again. The rights of society and the interests of others are nothing to the covetous. They fatten on the miseries of men, and consider not that poverty will come upon themselves (Prov. xviii. 20—22). 4. *A nation proudly ambitious.* They roam through the land, violently subdue everything before them, and deport themselves in pride and insolence. They "pass over" in quest of glory to fresh booty and new wars. The mightiest empires have been crushed by the weight of their own greatness. In their own ambitious ends they have gone beyond bounds, and brought their own ruin. When our energies are directed to personal aggrandisement and despotic rule we may expect a fall. "Pride," says Gurnall, "takes for its motto great *I* and little *you*." "Think not thy own shadow longer than that of others," says Sir Thomas Browne, "nor delight to take the altitude of thyself." Ambition and pride are often the precursors of ruin. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." **II. In giving them an easy victory.** In the figures mentioned, we notice—1. *That the conquest is irresistible.* "Their horses are swifter than the *leopards*," the lightest, swiftest, and most bloodthirsty of beasts of prey. "They shall fly as the *eagle*," hastening to devour what it has secured. "Our persecutors are swifter than eagles of the heavens" (Lam. iv. 19: Ezek. xvii. 3). 2. *That the conquest is violent.* "They shall come all for violence." The enemy would sweep over them like the east wind, blasting and bearing down everything before it. Gathering the people "as the sand," and burying them like caravans in heaps of destruction. 3. *That the conquest is easy.* No opposition will hinder them from performing their work. (*a*) *The power of kings* was laughed at. Princes and confederates would be exposed to greatest contempt and most ignominious treatment. Kings will be put down and set up in pleasure and in sport. "They shall scoff at the kings." (*b*) *The strength*

of fortifications was derided. Forts and strongholds in which men trust will prove matters of derision to the agents of God's vengeance. "They shall deride every stronghold." The mightiest fort will be captured and levelled in the dust. "For they shall heap dust and take it." 4. *That the conquest is complete.* "Which shall march through the breadth of the land." Far and wide they spread terror and death. Unhindered and irresistible they swept over the earth. Kings fled in fear, palaces were plundered with violence, and lands were taken by force. They did as they liked. Their own lust was their law. No power of God or man seemed to limit them in the infliction of judgment upon the Jews, or in getting honour for themselves. God sometimes puts the stubborn and rebellious into the hands of those who measure justice by their own judgment and honour by their own dignity. "Their judgment and their dignity shall come of themselves"—

> "The good old rule
> Sufficeth them, the simple plan,
> That they should take who have the power,
> And they should keep who can" [*Wordsworth*].

EVENING WOLVES.—*Verse* 8.

Wolves are very fierce when urged to rabidness by a whole day's hunger. They prowl forth in that darkness in which all the beasts of the forests creep forth (Ps. civ. 20). Such is the disposition of some men towards their fellow-creatures These evening wolves typify—

I. False teachers. False prophets are compared to "ravening wolves," rapacious, mischievous, and injurious to the flock of God (Matt. vii. 15). We are warned against heretics, and false guides, such as Hymenæus, Alexander, and Philetus. "After my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts xx. 29). **II. Cruel persecutors.** With relentless spite some men pursue others. Christians are wilfully misrepresented in character and conduct; reviled, insulted, and spitefully used (Matt. v. 11). Evil men, as "lions seeking whom they may devour," pursue them in envy. With keen scent and eager feet they are swift to shed innocent blood. "The assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul." **III. Anxious cares.** The cares of this world devour the good in the heart. Domestic life and business impair the growth of Christian character. Excessive care destroys peace, induces loss of temper, hinders prayer, and hurries into dangerous conduct. "Be *careful* for nothing." **IV. Distracting doubts.** Doubts and fears distress the mind, hide the light of God's countenance, and pursue us like evening wolves.

> "To doubt
> Is worse than to have lost: and to despair,
> Is but to antedate those miseries
> That must fall on us" [*Massinger*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 6. He is said to *raise up* those whom he allows to be stirred up against his people, since the events which his providence permits favours their designs, and it rests with him to withhold them. They lift themselves up for some end of covetousness or pride. But there is a higher order of things in which God orders their actions to fulfil by their iniquities his righteousness [*Pusey*].

Ver. 8. 1. God's hand is seen in furnishing the enemies of his people with all necessary qualifications for carrying on their enterprise. Boldness, swiftness, number, &c. 2. The fierceness of the Divine anger may be read in the celerity and activity with which they execute their designs. 3. It is vain for impenitent sinners to lean upon any apparent ground of security or con-

fidence when God arises to plead with them. Distance of places, extent of country, and strength of buildings will not avail [cf. *Hutcheson*].

Ver. 9. *Violence.* Learn, 1. That God often repays violence with violence. 2. Yet those employed by God to punish others may sin themselves by lust and self-aggrandizement.

East Wind. "The East Wind, it seemeth, was the most unwholesome breath of heaven upon that land; within short time withered and destroyed the fruits of the earth, and the hopes of the spring. The Lord saith that the faces of the Chaldeans, the very sight of them, shall be as baneful and as irresistible as the East Wind." The cruelties of men, the calamities which attend wars and conquests, ought to invite sinners not to provoke God to give them up to such punishment—to terrify such as fear not the threatenings of the Word, and to point out to those suffering such a lot, the bitterness of departing from God [*Hutcheson*].

Vers. 2—11. *How utterly incomprehensible are the Judgments of God!* 1. Incomprehensible in their delay, to the view of those who have no patience, and think that God ought to act as speedily as their anger prompts them (vers. 2, 3). 2. Incomprehensible in their threatening, to those upon whom they will fall, and who nevertheless continue to sin in security (ver. 4). 3. Incomprehensible to every human mind in their realization. For—(*a*) They are greater than any human thought would anticipate (vers. 5, 6). (*b*) They take place in ways and by means of which no man would dream (ver. 6). (*c*) They are often brought about by men and events that, at first sight, have nothing in common with God. 4. Incomprehensible in their grandeur and universality, to those by whom they are accomplished (ver. 11) [*Lange*].

God's deeds are always *Niphlaoth*, and have on them something to excite wonder and astonishment. Incredible as they seem, we know that they will be performed, from past history, present signs, and the light of God's Word. *How* they are to happen is a mystery. It is ours to fear, believe, and obey. Regard the threatening, and escape the danger.

HOMILETICS.

SUCCESS ABUSED.—*Verses* 11 *and* 16.

Elated with success, the Chaldeans pass over all bounds and restraints. In pride and arrogance they attribute all glory to themselves or their gods, deify their own power, and incur the Divine displeasure. They were intoxicated with their success and abused it. Success is abused—

I. When it is over-valued. Men cry, "Nothing succeeds like success," and aim at it, for its own sake. In anticipation and possession it is over-estimated. It creates pride, and sometimes overturns reason. "The human heart," says Volney, "is often the victim of the sensations of the moment; success intoxicates it to presumption, and disappointment dejects and terrifies it." **II. When it is thought to cover sins.** If sinful acts are crowned with success, they are considered proofs of prowess, matters of boasting and exultation. The end is thought to justify the means. The Chaldeans rejoiced in conquests gained by the miseries of the Jews, grew haughty and insolent, and prepared themselves for ruin by worshipping their own power. Speed in the wrong direction is construed into providence; favour to sinful projects and success in evil courses are taken as signs of God's approval. Thus, because God suffers mischief to prosper, men forget their guilt and rejoice in iniquity. But they prosper only to die, and like beasts fatten to fit them for slaughter. Fat may be their portion and plenteous their meat (ver. 16), but "he slew the fattest of them" (Ps. lxxxviii. 31). **III. When it is ascribed to wrong sources.** Men render Divine honours to themselves and their idols rather than to God, who alone gives skill and success. 1. *They attribute*

success to idols. "Imputing this his power unto his god." The Chaldeans ascribed success to Bel and Nebo, and blasphemously argued that because they had conquered his people, Jehovah was inferior to their gods. Ancient Romans deified their standards and arms. Savage nations have made idols of their implements and arrows. There is no truth in that religion which dishonours the true God, and no stability in that prosperity which is attributed to idols. "He shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished" (Dan. xi. 36). 2. *They attribute success to their own power.* "They sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag." When men deny God, they deify themselves, and adore their own skill. Ajax called his sword his god, and thanked it for all its brave achievements. Belshazzar said, "I will be like the Most High" (Isa. xiv. 14); the Prince of Tyre said, "I am a god" (Ezek. xxviii. 22); and Antichrist "exalts himself above all that is called God" (2 Thess. ii. 4). Nebuchadnezzar was proud of the might of his power, and the Assyrian declared, "By the strength of my hand I did it; and by my wisdom, for I am prudent" (Isa. x. 13—15). Sad are those events in life which minister pride, and give occasion to men to deprive God of honour and exalt themselves. "He who boasts of a thing," says Luther, "and is glad and joyous on account of it, but does not thank the true God, makes himself into an idol, gives himself the glory, and does not rejoice in God, but in his own strength and work."

"To our own nets ne'er bow we down,
Lest on the eternal shore,
The angels, while our draughts they own
Reject us evermore" [*Keble*].

God's Character a Ground of Consolation in Distress.—*Verse* 13.

The prophet turns again to God in sublime contrast to the deifying of human power—vindicates the character of Jehovah as opposed to idols, and declares entire confidence in him as the true ground of consolation in distress—"Art thou not from everlasting?" &c.

I. God is Eternal. Go back as far as possible in thought, God was before thought. In the beginning God. "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God." Hence, 1. *God is unchangeable in his purpose.* He is a rock firm and immovable. From the eternity of his nature the prophet infers the eternity of his purpose. "My God." He has delivered in the past, and will deliver in the present and in the future (2 Cor. i. 10). Whatever changes he never changes. His people lay hold of his covenant, claim a special interest and express a strong hope in it. "Therefore we shall not die." 1. *Temporally* we shall not die. God will reserve a remnant of the Jews to return from captivity to the land of their fathers, to build his temple and enlarge his Church. 2. *Spiritually* we shall not die. He will keep his promise, and we shall not lose an interest in a better life. 3. *Eternally* we shall not die. God having loved once will love to the end—will never cast off his people. In eternal wisdom God hath given eternal redemption, and an eternal inheritance. 2. *God is unchangeable in his providence.* The prophet might be distressed at the description of the enemy—the condition of his people might perplex and seem to contradict the covenant, but present judgment was only temporary chastisement. Their enemies would not destroy, but only correct them. The rod was in the hands of God. Because God lived, they would live (John xiv. 19). Men might be wicked, cruel, and perverse, but he was always the same. Clouds may hide the light, but do not destroy the sun. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" &c.

"Now thou array'st thine awful face
In angry frowns, without a smile;
We, through the cloud, believe thy grace,
Secure of thy compassion still."

II. God is holy. "Mine Holy One." The prophet implores God as an individual and in the name of Israel. God in a special manner separated them from other nations, avowed and adopted them as his own. He therefore takes special interest in them, and will exercise special mercy towards them (Hos. xi. 9). The chastisement of the enemy confirmed his holiness and purified his people. The victorious heathen were unholy, imputed power to idols, but he was the Holy One of Israel whom they reproached (Isa. xxxvii. 23). God's holiness then is—1. A guarantee of punishment to sin. 2. Of deliverance to his people: and, 3. Of justice and right to all men. Among his people, or in the wicked, God will not leave sin unpunished. "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

GOD DOES NOT APPROVE OF SIN.—*Verse* 13.

Men are tempted to think it is vain to serve God, when he permits the wicked to triumph over them. True views of God will check such thoughts. He cannot *look* upon sin with approbation. His eyes are too pure to *behold evil* and connive at it. We infer from this that God is holy, and will certainly punish sin.

I. The testimony of Scripture proves this. From beginning to end it sets forth the holiness of God. In rite and ceremony, in precept and doctrine, its constant voice is heard, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." **II. The testimony of Providence proves this.** In the expulsion of angels from heaven and our first parents from Eden—in floods and fire—in the history of Israel, and in the punishment of the wicked. We see justice written in actions, and God's abhorrence of sin in the judgments he has inflicted. Evil may array itself in wit and grandeur, or in villany and success, but it is always the abominable thing which the Lord hates. Its perpetrators are hated, and will be punished by him. "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all workers of iniquity."

THE ENIGMAS OF LIFE.—*Verses* 13—17.

Troubled thoughts are not easily driven away. Circumstances arise in which perplexities increase—in which God's conduct seems at variance with his Word, and in which God's people find it difficult or impossible to solve the enigmas of life. The prophet seemed astonished, and expostulated with God at his proceedings against the Jews by the Chaldeans. "*Wherefore* lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously," &c.

I. Why does God permit his people whom he loves to be persecuted? Why do the enemies who blaspheme thy name, deal cruelly and perfidiously with thy people? 1. *They are devoured.* "The wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he." This has always been the lot of God's people, from the days of Abel to the present time. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." But this cruelty was great. They were hunted and devoured like prey. 2. *They are destroyed.* God permitted the weaker to be taken by the stronger. They were caught like fish in the sea, crushed like reptiles in the dust. They had no defender to protect nor avenge them. God was silent and held his tongue. This seems strange to those who trust in God. To punish the wicked may be the will of God, but to strike at the righteous is treason. Why then does God permit this? How can he love them? If God has fixed the times for executing his purposes why does he hide them from his people (Job xxiv. 1)? "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?" **II. Why does God.**

who is holy, permit sinners to prosper in wickedness? "Wherefore lookest thou," &c. 1. *Wickedness exulting over goodness.* Rejoicing in its work of mischief and destruction. Men glory in their crimes. 2. *Wickedness idolizing itself.* "They sacrifice unto their own net." Coarse forms of idolatry spring from a corrupt mind. When the idol is first set up in the heart, men will not be long before they worship their wealth and wisdom, their armies and navies. 3. *Wickedness apparently perpetual.* The enemy had gathered immense booty, and was rejoicing over it. They had caught the Jews like fish in a net. Will they devour what they have taken? Will they empty the net again, and unceasingly go on without check or punishment? asks the prophet. How perplexing were these things to his mind. They have been perplexing to the good in every age. The abnormal state of the world is a sore puzzle to most men. Ovid was tempted to say there were no gods. Brutus condemned virtue entirely when defeated, and Pompey declared that a mist had come over the eyes of Providence, when overcome by Cæsar. Thus men charge God foolishly. The Psalmist solved the problem in nearness to God (Ps. lxxiii. 17)—saw that this life was only a state of trial and probation. Things may stagger the godly now, for we are brutish in knowledge, impatient in spirit, and incapable of comprehending God's plans. Wait patiently, all will be cleared up before the great tribunal. "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

> "Fixed to the hold, so might the sailor aim,
> To judge the pilot, and the steerage blame,
> As we direct to God what should belong,
> Or say that Sovereign Wisdom governs wrong."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 12. Notice, 1. *The grievous affliction of God's people.* They were ready to die, oppressed, and almost annihilated. 2. *The Divine appointment of this affliction.* "Thou hast ordained them for judgment." The enemy had no power over Israel but what God gave them. Hence the affliction was (1) Appointed in *measure.* (2) Appointed in *duration.* (3) Appointed in *instrumentality.* All power is derived from God, and is under his control (Ps. xvii. 14). Men are in his hands, cannot destroy his people, nor frustrate his design. 3. *The blessed design of this affliction.* "Thou hast established them for correction." Not for vengeance, not for their own ends and pleasure; but for *correction.* This correction is needed, and should be expected. "As threshing separates the corn from the chaff," says Burton, "so does affliction purify virtue." Michael Angelo saw in the rude block an angel form, and with a sculptor's skill carved the image and revealed its beauty; so God "rough hews" his people, forms and fashions them by affliction into his likeness. "Blessed is he whom thou chastenest." 4. *The vigorous hope under this affliction.* "We shall not die." On the unchanging character and the eternal covenant of God, we ground our hope of deliverance, and our belief in the perpetuity of his Church. "Virtue," says Dr. Moore, "can stand its ground as long as life; so that a soul well principled will be sooner separated than subdued." "The Lord hath chastened me sore; but he hath not given me over unto death." "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Let us thank God for discipline, and kiss the rod which smites us. It is not the stroke of a tyrant, but the chastening of a Father.

> "Such sharpness shows the sweetest Friend,
> Such cuttings rather heal than rend."

The three titles of God in this verse are significant. "The God to whom the prophet prays is *Jehovah*, the absolutely constant One, who is always the same in word and work (see Gen. ii. 4); he is also *Elohai, my*, i. e. Israel's God, who from time immemorial has proved to

the people whom he had chosen as his possession, that he is their God; and the *Holy One* of Israel, the absolutely Pure One, who cannot look upon evil, and therefore cannot endure that the wicked should devour the righteous" [*Keil*].

Vers. 14, 15. The *two figures* (fish and reptiles) indicate the low and helpless condition of the Jews. The world is like a troubled sea, the weaker are caught and devoured by the stronger—the more venomous hurt and destroy the rest. Notice also the *agencies* of cruelty. 1. The angle; 2. The net; and 3. The drag. "Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans are a faint image of Satan, who casts out his baits and his nets in the stormy sea of this life, taking some by individual craft, sweeping others in whole masses to do evil; and whoso hath no ruler, and will not have Christ to reign over them, he allures, hurries, drags away as his prey" [*Pusey*].

Vers. 15, 16. Notice, 1. The instruments of wickedness. 2. The success of wickedness. 3. The insolence of wickedness. "Here is the growth of iniquity; for first they exercise all cruel inhumanity against the Jews, then they rejoice over them, and then doth the sin grow out of measure sinful, for they forbear not to provoke God himself by their pride of heart, robbing him of the glory of his own work, and ascribing it to themselves" [*Marbury*].

The career of a great conqueror has something intoxicating. Before Napoleon men degraded themselves and became idolaters. The sin of the world-power is two-fold; first, it deals with the property of God as if it were its own; secondly, it does not honour God for the success granted to it, but its own power [*Lange*].

Ver. 17. 1. The question—"Shall they?" 2. From whence the answer. (*a*) reason? (*b*) philosophy? (*c*) experience? (*d*) it must be left where the Psalmist leaves it (Ps. lxxiv. 22). 3. The right attitude in ch. ii.

Vers. 13—17. *There is a limit set to the power of the wicked.* 1. God is holy. 2. But the work of the wicked is unholy. For, (*a*) It is a work of hatred against the righteous. (*b*) It is an abuse of the powers bestowed by God. (*c*) It does nothing for God, but everything for itself (ver. 15). (*d*) It does not give God honour, but makes itself an idol (ver. 16). 3. Therefore it must have an end (ver. 17) [*Lange*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Vers. 1—4. *How long.* If men look upon some of God's providential dealings with a mere eye of reason, they will hardly find any sense therein, such their muddle and disorder. But, alas! the wrong side is objected to our eyes, while the right side is presented to the high God of heaven, who knoweth that an admirable order doth result out of this confusion: and what is presented to him at present may, hereafter, be so showed to us as to convince our judgments in the truth thereof [*T. Fuller*].

Ver. 5. *Wonder.* Others only look and wonder, the Christian only looks and loves [*Hurrion*].

Vers. 6—11. *Bitter.* An envious man waxeth lean with the fatness of his neighbours. Envy is the daughter of pride, the beginner of secret sedition, and the perpetual torment of virtue [*Socrates*].

Ver. 7. *Dignity.* Self-assumed superiority of the Chaldeans. "Every man has just as much vanity as he wants understanding" [*Pope*].

> "They whose wit
> Values itself so highly, that to that
> All matters else seem weak, can hardly love,
> Or take a shape or feeling of affection,
> Being so self-endeared" [*Shakespeare*].

Vers. 12—17. Let us at all times cherish in our minds an unrelaxing certainty, that we shall always find the Almighty perfect in his justice to all, and in everything, and individually to each of us, as soon as we have sufficient knowledge of his operations with respect to us. Let us wait with patience until what we do not perceive or cannot

comprehend shall be satisfactorily elucidated to us. We expect this equity in our intercourse with each other. Let us also so conduct ourselves, in all our thoughts and feelings with reference to Him, whatever may be his present or future dispensations personally to ourselves [*Turner*].

Shall they? Providence is often mysterious and a source of perplexity to us. Walking in Hyde Park one day, I saw a piece of paper on the grass. I picked it up; it was a part of a letter; the beginning was wanting, the end was not there: I could make nothing of it. Such is providence. You cannot see beginning or end, only a part. When you can see the whole, then the mystery will be unveiled. [*Thomas Jones*, 1871].

CHAPTER II.

Critical Notes.] **Watch**] As those ascending high places to look into the distance (2 Kings ix. 17: 2 Sam. xviii. 24). **Set**] Plant myself firmly. **To see**] what God will say. **Unto**] Lit. *in* me; outwardly to the ear, inwardly to the heart; fixed in purpose and earnest in mind he waits for God's revelation. **Reproved**] when reasoned with, for my expostulation with God. **2. Vision**] Outwardly seen and inwardly perceived. **Write**] The revelation important and immutable. **Plain**] Clearly, that it may easily be read (cf. Deut. xxvii. 8; i. 5). **3. For**] The reason for writing. **Appointed**] *i. e.* future time fixed by God (Dan. x. 14; xi. 27). **Speak**] Lit. breathe out (then speak), hasten to the end. **Tarry**] Linger, delay a little. **Come**] It is certain, though future. **Not tarry**] Be behindhand or go beyond the appointed time. **4.**] Judgment announced. **Lifted**] Puffed up, then haughty or presumptuous. **Upright**] Not straight, not without turning or trickery. The heart of the enemy was proud and displeasing to God. **But**] Marking the contrast between the Jew and the Chaldean, the believer and the unbeliever. **Live**] Opposed to death. The boast of power in one destroyed, the constant faith of the other secures salvation. **Faith**] from *ămăn*, to be firmly rooted or established, as a building upon its foundation, or a tree by its roots. Constant and strong faith is necessary under all the afflictions of life (cf. Rom. i. 17: Heb. x. 38). **5.**] The thought further developed by a proverbial saying with special reference to the Chaldeans. They were given to wine and insatiable conquest. "Wine is treacherous; the haughty man stayeth not at home" [*Hend.*] (cf. Prov. xxx. 1). **Proud**] Elated, haughty (Prov. xxi. 24). **Home**] For he longs to go forth to destroy. **Desire**] Lit. soul; passions widen or enlarge the soul (Ps. xxvii. 12; xli. 2, 3: Isa. v. 14). **Hell**] Which is insatiable (Prov. xxx. 16). **Death**] Which spares none, but swallows up every living thing (Prov. xxvii. 20). **Gather**] Lit. hath gathered. "He describes it, for the rapidity with which he completes what he longs for, as though it were already done" [*Pusey*]. **6. These**] "nations" and "people" (ver. 4). **Parable**] A derisive song (Isa. xiv. 4: Mic. ii. 4), some; ode, given by others, enigmatical in character. **Woes**] fivefold given, a song raised by the oppressed over the fall of the oppressor. *First woe*, ill-gotten gains. **Increaseth**] *i. e.* seizes what does not belong to him. **How long**] will he do this with impunity? **Ladeth**] To make heavy by a weight or load upon one. **Thick clay**] (mass of dirt) Lit. a cloud of clay, which will cause her ruin. Many render "*a burden of pledges gained by usury*," taken by an unmerciful usurer, which he will be compelled to give up (Deut. xxiv. 10). **7. Shall**] Answer to question, How long? **Bite**] of a snake; the enemy like savage vipers (Jer. viii. 17). **Rise**] Shake or rouse up from possession. **8. Because**] Reason for woe. **Many**] Boundless the spoil. **Remnant**] Only a remnant left, will be sufficient to punish. "**Blood, land, and city**] Understood generally, and not restricted to the Jews with their country and its metropolis" [*Hend.*]. **9. Woe**] the second, against establishing a permanent settlement by godless gain. **Evil**] Covetousness surpassingly evil and fatal to itself. **House**] Not the palace but the dynasty (ver. 10). **High**] As eagles build nests on high to protect from harm (cf. Job xxxix. 27); "so does the Chaldean seek to elevate and strengthen his rule by robbery and plunder, that it may never be wrested from his family again." **10. Shame**] the result instead of glory. **11.**] Personification. **Cry**] For the injustice they had suffered (cf. Luke xix. 40). **Answer**] the stone, *i. e.* join in its crying. **12. Woe**] the third. **Town**] Babylon, rebuilt and enlarged by spoils of blood (Dan. iv. 30). **13. Fire**] Lit. to suffice the fire; conflagration and depopulation the result of all labour and fatigue. **14. For**] God has determined this result; usurped glory must be destroyed that his glory may spread (Isa. xi. 9). **Waters**] Surpassing abundance. This predictive of the gospel times. **15. Woe**] the fourth. **Bottle**] Skin in common use. **Look**] with delight (Gen. ix. 22). **Naked.**] The prostrate condition of the drunken man a figure of the overthrow of a conquered nation (Nah. iii. 11), and the uncovering of the shame denotes the ignominy that has fallen upon it (Nah. iii. 5: Isa. xlvii. 3). **16. Thou**] shalt

drink of the cup of sorrow (Jer. xxv. 15—17). **Foreskin**] As one uncircumcised. **Spewing**] Shameful vomiting will cover thy glory, *i. e.* destroy thee. **Turned**] Lit. shall turn itself from other nations. 17. **Violence**] Outrage in spoiling cedar forests to adorn magnificent edifices (cf. Isa. xiv. 8). **Cover**] Completeness of the destruction. Similar violence to that which they had displayed should fall upon them. 18.] Exposure of the folly of Babylon's idolatry. **What**] use? none whatever. **Lies**] Lying oracles connected with idol worship. **Dumb**] Nonentity (1 Cor. xii. 1). 19. **Awake**] to help. **Teach**] Ironical, *it teach!* **Breath**] Not at all breath, the spirit of life (Jer. x. 14). 20. **But**] Sublime contrast between Jehovah and utter vanity of idols. **Temple**] Enthroned in heaven ready to protect his people and destroy their enemies (Ps. xi. 4). He is not encased in gold and silver. **All**] *i. e.* the people must submit in reverence before him, and wait for his judgment (cf. Zeph. i. 7: Zech. ii. 17). It becomes all to adore such a God who will speak to the soul hushed in silence.

HOMILETICS.

The Waiting Servant.—*Verses* 1, 2.

Habakkuk had two great difficulties in justifying the Divine government. ***First***, the wickedness of the Jews and their oppression of the righteous few among them. God removed this difficulty by predicting that he would visit the corruption with captivity, and that the Chaldeans would punish them. But a *second* objection presented itself that the Chaldeans were worse than the Jews, the avengers more demoralized than the people. Hence the aspect appeared dark indeed to the prophet. The destruction of the temple, cessation of national worship, and universal depravity. Anxious for further light, he determines to take a stand and discern in the light of God's presence the solution of his difficulties.

I. The fixed purpose of the prophet. "I will stand and set me (firmly) upon the tower." The prophet made use of the means which God put within his reach to solve his doubts. All temptations and perplexities should lead us to the sanctuary of God. We should direct our prayer to him and look up beyond human vision. Habakkuk desired—1. *To be Divinely enlightened.* "To see what he will say to me." More truth and more light could be had. God could give these, and he would wait upon him in singleness of aim. The voice, the vision from God would clear away the mists and satisfy the heart. Men are ignorant, and reason is dumb in such circumstances. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." 2. *To be Divinely corrected.* "What I shall answer when I am reproved." He had been pleading with others and they had beset him with objections. He desires to be instructed and guided in his reply. Or he might have cherished wrong thoughts and uttered wrong words concerning God in his darkness. The psalmist stumbled and was hasty in his words, when he saw good men suffer and bad men prosper. "Let us be silent, that we may hear the whisper of the gods," says Emerson. **II. The appropriate attitude of the prophet.** "I will stand upon my watch." This position was most appropriate and safe. It includes—1. *Outward retirement.* He ascended the tower, excluded himself from the noise of the city and the excitement of society. Alone like Moses in the rock, he sought intercourse with God. "Apart from the world, and under the tuition of heaven, he was instructed in the principles of Divine wisdom." "All weighty things," says Richter, "are done in solitude, that is, without society." "Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee." 2. *Inward meditation.* The prophet was a man of reflection and prayer. He searched his own heart and examined his own ways. He gave his whole attention to his work. "Little can be done well to which the whole mind is not applied," says Johnson. In our great work there must be withdrawal from the world and concentration in self. "Commune with thine own heart." 3. *Earnest expectation.* The prophet waited in patience and perseverance. He did not think that his prayer was done with when offered. He did not find relief in his attitude but in God's answer. "I will watch to see." Ministers must acquit themselves like watchmen in an army or in a city, be awake when others sleep, and patiently seek to be filled with light and truth to give to others in times of darkness and danger.

III. The gracious answer to the prophet. "And the Lord answered me." Expectation was not disappointed. God is *sometimes* found of them that seek him not. But he pledges himself to hear those who sincerely call upon him. "He said not, Seek ye me in vain." The answer was an assurance of ruin to the Chaldeans when the chastisement of Israel was accomplished. It was far distant, would try the faith of God's people, but the event was certain and would come to pass. The answer was to be written in a conspicuous place, recorded for the help of the people in the suspension of the fulfilment, and known as a proof of Divine power and faithfulness when accomplished. Both Israel and Chaldea must own. "And the thing was true, but the appointed time was long."

THE APPOINTED VISION.—*Verses* 2, 3.

The prophet must not only *hear* but record the Word of God. What the seer beholds he must *write*. "Write the vision."

I. To be permanently recorded. The preacher must die, for all flesh is grass. Tradition is uncertain and may be corrupted. Philosophy is insufficient, and human reason is delusive. The testimony of men would continually perplex and mislead. But the Word of God stands for ever, an assurance and guide to all generations. "To the law and to the testimony." **II. To be universally understood.** "And make it plain upon tables." It must be legibly and correctly written upon accustomed material. Not the impressions, the recollections and surmisings of the mind, not something like the thing, but *the thing itself*. It must be delivered in simplicity, not hidden in flowers of rhetoric; adapted to the lowest capacity, not merely to the thoughtful few. "It takes all our learning to make things plain," says Usher. "Write upon the stones all the words of this law *very plainly*" (Deut. xxvii. 8). **III. To be prominently fixed.** "That he may run that readeth it." It must be so conspicuous that it may catch the eye of the traveller, hinder no duty, but read at once without difficulty. Some think that the reference is to the ancient posts which directed the man-slayer to the city of refuge, and that the reading should be "he that runneth may read." "Refuge" was a word so legible that one running for life was neither delayed nor puzzled to read. The writing (*a*) *Excites attention.* No one passes without noticing it. (*b*) *Directs the steps.* "This is the way, walk ye in it." (*c*) *Encourages speed* by well-grounded conviction of its truthfulness. "The words of the Lord are pure and forcible." **IV. To be a little delayed.** "The vision is yet for an appointed time." God's promises reach a long distance and comprehend vast agencies. Delay is discipline to us, and God has reasons for it. It tests our faith, cultivates our patience, and excites our hope. We cannot hasten the end and must therefore wait. We must not measure God's thoughts by our ways, and the purposes of eternity by the hours of time. We must not attribute delay to impotency or forgetfulness. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise." "And the thing was true, but the time appointed was long: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision," &c. (Dan. x. 1, 14).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 3. 1. As the mercies promised to the Church are in the hands of God, so is the timing of them; we are not therefore to expect that the performance of comfortable promises or of threatened vengeance will be always ready at our bid, but we must wait the Lord's time, who hath his own seasons for afflicting, trying, and delivering. 2. The Lord's delaying to appear diminisheth nothing of the certainty of performance that he hath promised to the Church. 3. But such is our weakness, that when he delayeth the performance we are ready to think that he denies it to all, which is to contradict the verdict of Scripture

here published [*Hutcheson*]. "God's time," says one, "to visit his people with his comforts is when they are most destitute of other comforts, and other comforters."

Divine slowness. 1. The history of the earth illustrates this principle. (1) Creation. (2) The movement of the seasons. 2. The history of all life illustrates this principle. (1) Individual life in man. (2) Life in national history. 3. Revealed religion harmonizes with this principle. (1) The long interval between promise and the coming of Christ. (2) The manner of his coming, not as the thoughts of men anticipated. (3) The history of revealed religion since the appearance of Christ. (4) The spiritual history of individual believers. (5) So with the events which make up the story of life [*Dr. R. Vaughan*].

God's word speaks and lies not. 1. It speaks at the end, therefore wait. It will not tarry beyond, though it may tarry till the very hour. (1) Impatience leads to *idolatry*, as in the case of the Israelites waiting for Moses (Ex. xxxiii. 2). Impatience leads to *self-destruction*, as in the case of Saul waiting for Samuel (1 Sam. xiii.). 2. It speaks and lies not. All failure is a kind of lying. (1) Failure in truth is a lie in word. (2) Failure in performance is a lie in act. "Every man is a liar, either by imposture, and so in purpose, or by impotency, and so in the event, deceiving those that rely upon him (Ps. lxii. 9). But God is faithful and cannot lie, "a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he'" [*Trapp*]. 3. *Hence wait for the fulfilment.* It will not tarry, it will not lie. "Waiting comprises in it (1) faith; (2) hope; (3) patience, or waiting to the end for the time which the Lord has appointed, but which he intends us to wait for" [*Lange*].

Surely come. 1. Here is the truth of the *decree*. "The vision is yet for an appointed time." 2. Here is the truth of the *word*. "It shall speak and not lie." 3. Here is the truth of the *deed*. "It will surely come" [*Marbury*].

HOMILETICS.

THE GREAT CONTRAST, OR THE BELIEVER AND THE UNBELIEVER.—*Verse* 4.

These words are generally applied to the Chaldeans, but we apply them to the Jews. Some believed the words of the prophet and others did not. "While those Jews who, elated by false views of security, refused to listen to the Divine message should have their security disturbed and their minds agitated by the calamities with which they would be visited, such as lived righteously before God and men should experience true happiness in the exercise of faith in that message and others which God might communicate to them by his prophets" [*Henderson*].

I. The unbeliever's character and conduct. God takes notice of man's behaviour in times of trial, for it tends to promote peace or disturbance, to honour or dishonour God. "Behold." The unbeliever is first described. 1. *He is proud in heart.* "His soul which is lifted up." The source of all sin is pride. In the oppression of the Chaldeans, the exaltation of anti-christ, and the rejection of the gospel, pride is manifest. "From heaven the sinning angels fell." "Pride," says one, "had her beginning among the angels that fell, her continuance on earth, her end in hell." 2. *He is perverted in mind.* His soul "is not upright in him." He is not straight, but crooked in his thoughts and purpose. He does not please God, but denies his providence and ridicules his word. He is conceited in his own wisdom, and will not wait upon God. Uprightness of character results from peace with God and reliance upon his grace. We see the stature, the complexion, and the deeds of men: God here reads the heart and censures the wicked. "The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them." 3. *He is restless in his soul.* Luther gives, "He who is stiff-necked will have no rest in his soul." Pride inflates and unsettles. Those who trust to themselves are disquieted within them, excited by fear, stirred to fresh adventures by hope, but disappointed in their pursuits. Unbelief can never give rest of mind.

He who toils, contrives, and wearies himself in pursuit of sin will find his labour in vain. Like the treasure in the miser's dream, all will vanish in a world of reality. "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." **II. The believer's character and conduct.** Opposed to those who proudly reject the prophetic vision, others give it a cordial reception. 1. *The believer confides in the word.* He has firm attachment to God, unwavering confidence in his promise, and waits patiently for its fulfilment. This faith is opposed to the pride of the enemy on the one hand and self-assertion on the other. "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper." 2. *The believer lives by his faith in the word.* "The just shall *live* by his faith." It supports in deepest sorrows, and brings comfort in darkest times. It gives real life. Whatever outward or inward sorrows assail, faith sustains in life and enjoyment. We begin to live by faith in Christ. Through union with him we gain spiritual, holy, and progressive life here and eternal life hereafter. Steadfast faith is the source and element of the highest life. "But without faith it is impossible to please God." 3. *The believer is delivered from death by his faith in the word.* Delivered from temporal calamity, spiritual death, and eternal wrath. Out of faith springs life. Abiding faith is continuous life; but life never dwells in the unbelieving heart. If faith in God only is the source of life, then pride which estranges from God results in death. Faith raises a man from danger and sets him on high (Ps. xci. 14). There he is "kept by the power of God unto salvation." "Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 4. 1. *Unsanctified affliction begets a wrong spirit.* The soul is lifted up. Instead of humbling and correcting, trial often discovers pride, murmuring against Divine sovereignty, and vain thoughts of self. 2. *The wrong spirit when cherished under affliction begets apostasy.* Those who are proud and complain will not long wait upon God. They become self-sufficient, unrighteous, and withdraw from God. "The just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him." This verse containeth an antithesis, wherein two contraries are set in opposition one against the other. (1) The man that is lifted up. In which note two things. (*a*) His notation, "lifted up." (*b*) His censure, "his soul is not right." (2) The just man. (*a*) By *just* we understand not legal righteousness but evangelical righteousness, rectitude of obedience and holy life. (*b*) He shall live, naturally, against oppression; spiritually, in Jesus Christ; eternally, in glory [*Marbury*].

Notice the relation between *righteousness*, *faith*, and *life*. Three words containing the essence of creeds and the requirements of the gospel. "This sentence, *the just shall live by faith*, is universal, belonging at once to Jews and Christians, to sinners who are *first* being justified, as also to those who are already justified. For the spiritual life of each of these begins, is maintained, and grows through faith. When then it is said, *the just shall live by his faith*, this word *his* marks the cause, which both begins and preserves life. The just, believing and hoping in God, begins to live spiritually, to have a soul right within him, whereby he pleases God; and again, advancing and making progress in this his faith and hope in God, therewith advances and makes progress in the spiritual life, in rightness and righteousness of soul, in the grace and friendship of God, so as more and more to please God" [*Pusey*]. This is an answer to those that ask, What shall we do till the vision speak? how shall we hold out till it come? till the 70 years of captivity be expired? "The just shall live by faith," saith he, and shall make a good living of it too; he shall live and be safe by the same faith whereby he is just. He shall feed upon his faith, as some read that (Ps. xxxvii 3) [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

WINE A DECEIVER.—*Verse* 5.

This verse not only developes the thought of the preceding, but adds another feature. *Yea also*, i. e. add to this that wine is treacherous [cf. *Keil*]. The general rule is applied to all oppressors, and especially to the Chaldeans, who were addicted to the sins here described.

I. Wine deceives in its nature. Its victims are mocked and grievously deceived. Wine promises pleasures which it cannot give. Strong drink is raging, not that "good creature" which some think it is. Intoxicating drinks abuse men, deceive, and lead them astray. They are overcome, beguiled, and befooled before they are aware. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." **II. Wine deceives in its effects.** "That it strengthens the system is a deception; chemistry has shown that it contains no nourishment for the body. That it enriches the national revenue is a deception. It is true that the taxes on alcoholic drinks bring millions annually into the national exchequer, but how much of the wealth of the nation does it exhaust by the pauperism and crime which it creates! Alcoholic drink is the great false prophet in England" [*Dr. Thomas*]. Prince and people, priest and prophet, have "erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way."

> "Ah! sly deceiver! branded o'er and o'er,
> Yet still believed! exulting o'er the wrecks
> Of sober vows" [*Armstrong, J.*, M.D., 1744].

WINE AND ITS ASSOCIATES.—*Verse* 5.

Drunkenness itself is sin, and is the cause of other sins. Those who are given to wine are sensual and voluptuous. Wine never stands alone. We have here its associated evils.

I. Pride. "He is a proud man." The proud man thinks too much of himself, despises others, and is arrogant in his conduct, "dealeth in proud wrath." Pharaoh, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar are fearful examples of pride. Flushed with wine, Belshazzar and his princes desecrated the sacred vessels and insulted God. The drunkenness of the inhabitants enabled Cyrus to take Babylon, well provisioned and strongly fortified. Pride "is a vice," says Hooker, "which cleaveth so fast unto the hearts of men, that if we were to strip ourselves of all faults one by one we should undoubtedly find it the very last and hardest to put off." "A man's pride shall bring him low." **II. Ambition.** "Neither keepeth at home." Restless in spirit and in condition. Though home be a palace, to a discontented mind it is a prison. Drunk with ambition, as well as wine, the Chaldeans were not satisfied with their splendid kingdom, but sought to enlarge it. The world cannot fill the abyss of the soul without God. The man who treads others under his feet exalts his gate (Prov. xvii. 19) above his neighbour, affects a style beyond his rank, and seeks destruction. Think of Alexander, Cæsar, and Napoleon. When Philip was thrown down in the games he saw the marks of his body, and said, "How little a parcel of earth will hold us when we are dead, who are ambitiously seeking after the whole world while living." **III. Covetousness.** "Who enlargeth his desire as hell," &c. Covetousness and greed of wealth result from pride. Covetous men invade the rights and seize the property of others. One nation will not satisfy without another. The ambitious "gathereth unto him all nations and heapeth unto him all people." This passion is never satisfied. 1. *It is like Hades*, which devours in its desire and act, and ever cries Give, give. "Hell and destruction are never full." 2. *It is like death*, which has slain its millions and ready to take as many more. Death spares none but is terrible to all. "Hell hath enlarged herself and opened her mouth without measure."

THE SIN OF THE AVARICIOUS.—*Verses* 6—8.

The first woe is pronounced, and the sentence passed, upon avaricious men in these words. The fundamental thought is like that expressed concerning the Chaldæan, in Isa. xiv. 12—14. Ambition manifests itself in cruelty, and proud edifices built upon the ruins of others.

I. Avaricious men increase their guilt. The covetous and those who thrive unlawfully in the world are under woe. They multiply their sins and their judgments. They break God's commands, and add injustice to their apostasy (1 Tim. vi. 10). "Great abundance of riches cannot of any man," says Erasmus, "be both gathered and kept without sin." "A faithful man shall abound with blessings; but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent." **II. Avaricious men increase their enemies.** "Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee?" &c. God will not long permit their conduct to prosper. Enemies will suddenly rise up to disturb their rest. When they are most secure and least prepared nations will retaliate; "the remnant of the people," whom they have despised, or whom God has hid from their fury, will rise against them. Those whom they have oppressed shall taunt them. Nations and "many nations" will destroy them. Covetous and ambitious men turn God and their fellow-creatures into their enemies. "For many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of them also, and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the works of their own hands." **III. Avaricious men increase their dangers.** Men haste to be rich and rush into danger. 1. *They heap up booty for others.* "Thou shalt be for booties unto them." Notwithstanding their labour and strength, the enemy will easily overcome them. Their wealth gotten by vanity will be diminished. Men collect and foster what they cannot keep. They brood over ill-gotten gains which forsake and disappoint them. "As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool." 2. *They insure fearful retribution.* As they had spoiled others, they would be spoiled themselves. "Refrain from covetousness," says Plato, "and thy estate shall prosper." Innocent blood which they had shed would be avenged upon the land, the city, and the people (ver. 8). "When thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 6. 1. *Ambitious men become contemptible to others.* They are ignominious, a taunting proverb, a public derision. "Shall not these take up a parable against him?" 2. *Ambitious men have no right to the possession of that which they illegally acquire.* Unjust conquest brings a curse. "Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his." 3. *Ambitious men will be stripped of all their unjust acquisitions.* To what end does the conqueror sweep all nations together. Not for himself, but for others. "Riches do not exhilarate us so much with their possession as they torment us with their loss" [*Gregory*].

Riches are often—1. Connected with *covetousness.* 2. With *violence,*—oppression, robbery, cruelty. 3. With *folly.* What is that heaped up?—only "*clay.*" What results from all toil and vexation?—a burden for themselves; "*ladeth* himself." "A bag of gold from a Western steamer was found bound to the neck of the robber, his treasure having sunk him" [*Van Doren*]. "A great fortune is a great slavery" [*Seneca*].

Ver. 8. *People shall spoil thee.* Avaricious men are spoiled: 1. In their *friends;* who fall away, taunt, and help to strip them. 2. In their *dignities;* which are tainted by sin and fall into dust. 3. In their *reputations;* their names are a proverb in the land, and hated by all men. 4. In their *posterity;* who are cursed by the sins of their

fathers, and cut off from the earth. "God loves to retaliate, to spoil the spoilers by a remnant of the people, by such as were of no note, and much unlikely to do such exploits. Thus he spoiled these Babylonians, by Cyrus and his Medes; the Persians, by Alexander and his Macedonians. So the Roman empire was miserably rent and torn by the Goths, Vandals, Huns, Lombards, people not before heard of, and the Greek empire by Turks, Tartars, Saracens, Scythians" [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

The Evil Covetousness.—*Verses* 9—11.

The second woe is now pronounced against coveting still more, and aiming still higher. The desire to build stately palaces, to be exempt from common misfortunes, and to perpetuate human greatness, is condemned. It is an evil covetousness or gain.

I. The design of this covetousness. "That he may set his nest on high," &c. 1. *To enjoy the comforts of life.* The covetous seek ease and comfort, make their nest in their acquisitions, and feather it for their offspring, as the eagle builds on high to save its young from destruction. They think their prosperity can never change, and believe they have enough to secure perpetual comfort. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease," &c. 2. *To escape the calamities of life.* "That he may be delivered from the power of evil." He fears evil from those whom he has injured, and builds on high, and fortifies himself against dangers. But what avails the height, when sin is in the foundation? Babylon was built on high, encircled by walls which no invader could scale or shatter. But it was levelled to the dust, and its proud king ranked with the brutes. God can overthrow the strongest tower, and terror invade the proudest conscience. "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down" (Ob. 4: Jer. xlix. 16). **II. The proofs of this covetousness.** The very buildings which they rear cry out against their conduct. God's works speak of his wisdom, power, and glory. So man's works declare his skill and his guilt. Works of mercy are memorials before God, and plead there; works of cruelty and wrong cry out for vengeance upon the oppressor. 1. The *stones in the wall* cry out. 2. The *beam out of the timber* responds to the cry. Here are strange witnesses, woeful antiphonies in sin. If everything else is silent, their houses built by oppression and blood shall testify against them. The whole creation groans beneath the bondage of their corruption. "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work." **III. The results of this covetousness.** The covetous man takes a wrong course for his wealth, his family, and his posterity. With all his pains and schemes he cannot preserve himself from utter ignominy and ruin. 1. *He inflicts personal injury.* "And hast sinned against thy soul." Men neglect their souls in pursuit of the world, and find their gain in the end to be a poor bargain. "The covetous man heaps up riches not to enjoy them, but to have them; and starves himself in the midst of plenty, and most unnaturally cheats and robs himself of that which is his own; and makes a hard shift to be as poor and miserable with a great estate as any man can be without it" [*Tillotson*]. In the present world he disquiets himself, pierces himself through with many sorrows; and in the world to come he will lose what the whole world cannot redeem—

> "Some, o'er-enamour'd of their bags, run mad,
> Groan under gold, yet weep for want of bread" [*Young*].

2. *He brings social disgrace.* "Thou hast consulted shame to thy house." By cutting off many people, he gained disgrace not safety. Mighty conquerors who

destroy others do not secure their own throne. Those who scandalise, undermine, or impoverish their neighbours to make room for themselves, turn their own glory and that of their posterity into shame (Prov. xv. 25—27; xiv. 11). "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; but the righteous shall flourish as a branch."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 9. *Evil* covetousness not a good covetousness. "Covet earnestly the best gifts," &c. The desire itself was evil in its nature. Its results were evil, from which he sought to deliver himself. Covetousness is always evil when joined with ambition, infidelity, and confidence in earthly wealth. *On high.* 1. The foundation of the building: pride, ambition, and earthly power. 2. The fate of the building. Overthrown by Divine power. "He who builds his house with other people's property, collects stones for his grave" [*Cramer*]. What the world calls protection, cannot protect against God's judgments; death mounts over all rocks [*Diedrich*]. A nest imports two things: *first*, warmth, or a fence against cold: *secondly*, safety, or a fence against danger. Nests are builded close, and so they are warm, and they are built either on high, or out of the way in some secret place, and so they are safe [*Caryl*].

Ver. 10. *Thou hast consulted.* Holy Scripture overlooks the means, and places us at the end of all. Whatever the wicked had in view, to satisfy ambition, avarice, passion, love of pleasure, or the rest of man's immediate ends, all he was doing was leading on to a further end—shame and death. He was bringing about not only these short-lived ends, but the lasting ends beyond, and these far more than the others, since that is the real end of a thing which abides, in which it at last ends [*Pusey*].

HOMILETICS.

The City of Blood.—*Verses* 12—14.

The third stanza, naturally suggested by the preceding verse, describes the method by which they carried out their ambitious ends. They might pretend public good, and seek to establish popular government; but the wealth of the kingdom was gained by bloody wars, and the city enlarged by captive tribes from other nations. "They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity."

I. The city was built with wrong materials. It was built with blood. God's people and heathen nations were oppressed, compelled to serve the king, and labour on the fortifications. All private fortunes gained by cruelty, all empires and greatness built and defended in contempt for God, and by the blood of men, are established by iniquity. They may impose upon the outward eye, seem strong and majestic, but they are inwardly rotten; will decay and fall to ruins. "Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not." **II. The builders of the city laboured in vain.** 1. *God frustrated their aims.* Human skill cannot succeed when God is opposed. In the Church and in the world, nothing can hinder his purposes. He is Lord of Hosts, whom the armies of heaven and the agencies of earth obey. As in building Babel of old so now can he confound the design, and frustrate the efforts, of men. "Behold, is it not of the Lord of Hosts?" 2. *God consumed their materials.* They toiled and were disappointed. They built the city, and reared splendid palaces, only for the fire. They laboured, with intense energy and pride, to accomplish their own ends, but they "wearied themselves for very vanity." Men fatigue themselves in pursuit of wealth and honour, weary themselves in sin, and the result is consumed in the fire. "The people shall labour in vain (for vanity) and the folk in (for) the fire, and they shall be weary." **III. The city shall eventually be destroyed.** "For the

earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord." God will be known by the judgments which he executes upon wrong-doers. All violence and injustice, like that of Babylon and Antichrist, will be overturned. The name of God will be read in the punishment of the wicked, and the deliverance of his people. The glory of God, obscured by oppression and cruelty, in due time will shine forth from the clouds, and fill the earth with its splendour. "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord."

A GLORIOUS DAY.—*Verse* 14.

"*For*" indicates the reason for the sentence pronounced. God had determined to manifest his glory in the judgment and overthrow of all ungodly powers (cf. Isa. ii. 12—21; vi. 3: Num. xiv. 21).

I. The blessing predicted. "The knowledge of the glory of the Lord." God is glorious in character and procedure. And of this glory he is so jealous that he will not give it to another (Isa. xlii. 8). The glory here is the revelation of impartial justice and irresistible power; a manifestation condemning sin and honouring truth. Not only the glory, but the *knowledge* of it, shall fill the earth. Men shall *recognize* it, see mercy and judgment, and learn that, "verily, there is a reward for the righteous: verily, he is a God that judgeth in the earth." **II. The method of revealing this blessing.** In the connection of the words, we learn that God reveals and magnifies his glory, when sin is prevalent, and human glory is decayed. In the destruction of Babylon and all the powers that resemble it, and in the deliverance and restoration of the Jews, we see the glory of God. But this is only a type of the destruction of error and the spread of Gospel truth. Both judgment and mercy are requisite to fill the earth with the glory of the Lord. Everything hostile to him, and the interests of his people, must be destroyed. The kingdom of Christ set up, and the earth illuminated with his glory (Rev. xviii. 1). **III. The measure in which this blessing is bestowed.** "As the waters cover the sea." This indicates—1. *Depth.* God's judgments are a mighty deep, and the knowledge of them shall not be superficial. The nations shall feel them, and be *convicted* by the revelation of the Divine glory. 2. *Abundance.* The waters *cover* the sea, and spread far and wide. This knowledge will *fill* the earth. 3. *Permanence.* The waters of the sea abide, can never be exhausted nor diminished. Knowledge is increasing, the Gospel is spreading, and the bright day is predicted when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Ps. lxxii. 19: Isa. xi. 9).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 13. *Labour in the very fire.* Labour which fatigues; labour in vain; labour opposed to God. Sin is labour—the gain is vanity. Then why not observe who causes this? "It is the Lord that bringeth all the labours of the ungodly to loss and vanity, that when they come to thrash their crop of travail, they find nothing but straw and chaff. To express his power to do this he is here called the God of Hosts, for all things serve him, and he resisteth the proud. He layeth their honours in the dust; he disperseth their riches; he spoileth them of all their treasures: he that exalted them made them low; he that gave to them taketh away. They had need to be made to see this; therefore he saith, Is it not of the Lord?" [*Marbury*].

Ver. 14. The words of God in this text are full of marrow and fatness, for God is rich in mercy, so he dilateth his favours. 1. *In the latitude*, all the earth over. 2. *In the plenitude*, the earth shall be filled. 3. *In the magnitude*, the knowledge of God's glory. 4. *In the profundity*, as the waters cover the sea.

I. *The thing to be done.* The earth to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God. His *moral* excellences—holiness, righteousness and grace: his *natural*

perfections—power, wisdom, omniscience, and omnipotence to be made known. II. *The necessity of doing it.* God is seen in the physical universe, and in the powers of the human mind; but sin, like a mist, hides the glory. No intellectual effort, no human light whatever, can do the work. God must shine in Christ, shine into the world, and into the soul, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" (2 Cor. iv. 6). III. *Will it ever be done?* How dark the days of the prophet! How improbable the present signs! Yet how much has been done already! Sufficient to guarantee future success. God himself has pledged his word. "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

"So, Jesus, let thy kingdom come;
Then sin and hell's terrific gloom
Shall at its brightness flee away,—
The dawn of an eternal day."

HOMILETICS.

The Three Cups.—*Verses* 15—17.

Woe the fourth is pronounced upon beastly luxury, sensuality, and base treatment of subjugated nations. The bottle of wine turns out a cup of wrath, and the disposition in which it is given is that of voluptuousness and lust of power.

I. The cup of wine. "Woe to him that giveth his neighbour drink." The Chaldæans, with insatiable desire, allured neighbouring States, intoxicated them with lust of war, to obtain booty, and expose them to shame. 1. *Drink given to a neighbour.* Drinking oneself is bad enough, but to give to others is worse. To put the bottle to others is a practice too common in the palace and the public-house. By the laws of the club or the fashion of the Court, men are constrained to drink. 2. *Drink given to make a neighbour intoxicated.* To give drink to a weary traveller, a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, is commendable; but to offer the bottle with a design to intoxicate, to "make him drunken also," is abominable wickedness. 3. *Drink given to expose an intoxicated neighbour to shame and contempt.* "That thou mayest look on their nakedness." To look on such things with delight is most unnatural; to abuse men in such a condition is awful. Woe to them who entice others to drunkenness that they may take advantage of them, and mock their infirmities. **II. The cup of riot.** The shame with which the enemy was satisfied, was equivalent to riot, or revelling in shame. Belshazzar drank with his lords and ran to excess. In drink is a breach of propriety and good temper; "envyings, and murders, revellings, and such-like." Day by day we learn the corruption of morals engendered and the crimes committed in sensuality and drink. Every lust of the flesh finds in drunkenness and riot its appropriate fuel and fire, and its influence in seduction and ruin baffles all calculation and conception. "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying."

"Pass where we may, through city or through town,
Village, or hamlet, of this merry land,
Though lean and beggared, every twentieth pace
Conducts the unguarded nose to such a whiff
Of state debauch, as makes temperance real."

III. The cup of retribution. "The cup of the Lord's right hand shall be turned unto thee." To deal out, in barrel or bottle, inflaming and polluting drinks is not innocent and blameless conduct. Woe, heavy woe, is pronounced upon such acts. But when the motives are mercenary, and the intentions unkind, the punishment is heavy. 1. *They are filled with shame instead of glory.* They sought glory, thought to be rich by oppressing others, but they lost their reputation and were *filled* with shame. Drunkards and ambitious men proclaim their own shame. Shameful spewing is on their glory. God rejects their services, and nature abhors

their customs. "Their glory is their shame." 2. *They were treated as they treated others.* "Drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered." God's judgments are equitable. As they had drawn others to sensuality and cruelty, so they had to drink the very dregs, and become contemptible as a drunken man lying naked, or an uncircumcised heathen, polluting himself with filthy vomit. Sensuality entails shame. Those who aid in the degradation of others adopt the most effectual means to expose themselves. "The cup also shall pass through unto thee: thou shalt be drunken and shalt make thyself naked." 3. *They were overcome with the violence which they displayed to others.* "For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee." Violence to *nature*, in the destruction of the forests; to *beasts*, in hunting them for prey, or chasing them in fright; to *man*, in shedding innocent blood. The city, the country, and the people all suffered. The end of this plunder was not to adorn, but overwhelm them. The destruction was complete; "*cover* thee" (Isa. xiv. 6—8). Violence done to others will be sure to recoil upon the transgressors; "to make them a desolation, an astonishment, an hissing, and a curse; as it is this day" (Jer. xxv. 15—18).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 16. *Shame.* The shame of the ungodly cometh forth from himself; the shame he put others to is doubled upon himself; and the very means which he had used to fill himself with glory and greatness, cover the glory which by nature he had with the deeper disgrace, so that he should be a loathsome and revolting sight to all. Man veils foul deeds under fair words; God in his word unveils the foulness [*Pusey*].

The Lord's right hand shall be turned. 1. Retribution among men: *turned*, Lit. turn itself from others to you. Every one's turn will come. 2. Retribution measured among men. "The cup of the Lord's right hand." Measure for measure all sin brings its own retribution; but the violent will suffer "violence," and deeds of shame will be put to everlasting contempt. *Glory.* The Hebrew word for glory properly signifies weightiness; as the word twice here used for shame signifies lightness; an elegant opposition, showing that whatsoever the Babylonians gloried in, and held themselves honourable for, should be lightly accounted of, and lie buried in the sheet of shame, as in a dunghill of filthy vomit [*Trapp*].

Vers. 15, 16. That is an extraordinary kind of argument which infers, from the mention, or prohibition of an extreme sin, the rightfulness of the intervening and causative steps. Here, however, *all* the stages and agencies are denounced and condemned—the poisoned potion, the giving of it, and the final result [*Temp. Commentary*].

Ver. 17. *Beasts.* God avenges cruelty done to brutes. Learn—1. The providence of God over cattle. 2. The treatment they should receive at the hands of man. "Hath God care for oxen?" "We learn here that when God cometh to execute vengeance, he surveyeth the whole catalogue of offences; and as he saith in David, 'I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thee,' the wrong to the *cities*, to the *men*, to the *beasts*, to persons, to places, all comes into account, and the offenders shall smart for all" [*Marbury*].

HOMILETICS.

The Unprofitableness of Idolatry.—*Verses* 18, 19.

This fifth strophe does not utter woe at first, but makes prominent the cause that leads to it. Like the rest of heathen nations, the Chaldæans trusted to their gods, but all hope from this quarter is cut off. Idols profit nothing; it is folly therefore to carve and honour them.

I. Idolatry is a system of lies. "A teacher of lies." 1. *The idol itself is a lie.* It represents God as visible, finite, and dependent, whereas he is Infinite and Invisible. It contradicts the word of God and the nature of man; and represents carnal conceptions of truth and worship. 2. *The teaching of the idol is a lie.* In itself and by its priests it sustains delusions. Its oracle is the doctrine of vanities; it is a falsehood and a work of errors (Jer. x. 8), leading men to trust in dumb idols, the work of their own hands (1 Cor. xii. 2). "We have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves."

> "God's omnipresence seems not sensuous;
> Unless he be in us, we are not in him" [*Bailey*].

II. Idolatry is a system of impotence. Idols may be adorned and beautified, commended and honoured, but they are only *dumb nothings.* 1. *They are fashioned by man.* Carved and encased with gold and silver, and yet neither breath, feeling, nor understanding. They are inferior to their maker, how then can they impart life and help to those who trust them? "They that make a graven image are all of them vanity" (Isa. xliv. 9, 10). 2. *They respond not to the requests of man.* Men cry "to the wood," *Awake,* for our relief; "to the dumb stone," *Arise,* deliver me, for thou art my God (Isa. xliv. 17): but there is no answer. A god that cannot speak is nothing. The cries of man must be heard, the wants of man must be satisfied. Without a true response to the entreaties of man there is no religion. We cannot animate stocks and stones. Art and science may create and beautify gods; but this is labour in vain—will deceive, and nourish superstition. "They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths." **III. Idolatry is a system of vanity.** When men have done all they can, displayed their skill and carved their image, God ridicules the result. Only wood and stone, base and inferior matter. That *teach!* Yes, though dumb it speaks of impotence, vanity, and folly. 1. *What vanity to trust in a god of your own creation!* If images are made by man, how can they have the being and authority of God? Why spend your energy in the service of that which will not profit? "'Tis mad idolatry," says Shakspeare, "to make the service greater than the God." "What profiteth the graven image?" 2. *What folly to rely upon that which brings a curse!* "Woe unto him that said to the wood, Awake." Whatever is accounted a god, which is only a creature or a feigned thing, is a curse to man. It curses human nature by degrading it, and making men like brutes. It curses the world by bringing down the judgments of God. When men are determined not to retain God in their thoughts, but to exalt that which is below themselves to be in the place of God, they become brutish in their knowledge, vain in their imaginations, and alienated in their hearts. "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections."

The Divine Court.—*Verse* 20.

In sublime contrast to idols, Jehovah is set forth in his dwelling-place and authority. None should dispute with him, but stand in awe before him. In the court-house of God "let all the earth keep silence."

I. God resides in this court. "The Lord is in his holy temple." The world is not empty space. A true and personal God exists; not like idols dwelling in temples made with hands, but revealing himself in the visible universe. In heaven by glory and honour, in earth by grace and goodness. "The Being whose centre is everywhere, but whose circumference is nowhere." In every state and condition God is ever near. "The Lord is in his holy temple." **II. God governs in this court.** He *dwells* in his temple, and has not left the world to chance, inflexible law, or abstract powers. His *throne* is on high, and has neither been overturned nor vacated. He judges the world in righteousness, delivers his people in distress,

and punishes the insolence of the wicked. He is not enshrined in gold and silver; "but our God is in the heavens," reigning supreme over all the nations of the earth. He is the world's great King, discerning and rewarding the works and ways of men. "The Lord's throne is in heaven; his eyes behold, his eyelids try the children of men." III. God demands silence in his court. "Let all the earth keep silence." If we are silent in courts of law, if all are reverent and solemn before an earthly judge, how should we stand before Almighty God. 1. *Let sinners tremble at his judgments.* He will strike idolaters dumb, convince the wicked of folly, and cover them with shame. 2. *Let saints trust in his word.* If perplexed, "hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand" (Zeph. i. 7). If afflicted, "be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. xlvi. 10). If weakened in faith, and disappointed in prayer, "Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near: let them speak" (Isa. xli. 1). "In speaking of God our best eloquence is silence," says Hooker. "Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 18, 19. *The destruction of idols.* Created by man — deaf and dumb, impotent and false. *Dumb idols*: Lit. dumb nothings. "And what else are man's idols of wealth, honour, fame, which he makes to himself, the creatures of his own hands or mind—their greatness existing chiefly in his own imagination—before which *he* bows down himself, who is the image of God?" [*Pusey*]. *The folly of idol worshippers.* Trusting their own creation—calling upon it as God, and exposing their own souls. "Here is a double woe: 1. Loss of labour; 2. Want of help. In the first they bewray their folly; the god of this world hath made fools of them for turning the glory of the invisible God into the image of creatures; but in the second we find the misery, for we cannot subsist without help, and they trust to idols where there is no help" [*Marbury*].

Behold. Though the vanity of worshipping idols be palpably gross, so that seriously to consider it is sufficient to refute it, yet such is man's stupidity that he needs stirring up to notice the error of his way—to caution him of his danger, and to wean him from his sins [cf. *Hutcheson*].

Vers. 4, 14, 20. *Three bright stars.* As the prophet stood on his eminence and saw nothing but darkness, God revealed three great principles which infused light and life into the gloom—principles which stand out to this day to all perplexed, fearful, and sceptical souls, as stars in a dark sky. 1. *The just shall live by faith.* A truth so important that it is quoted thrice in the New Testament (Rom. i. 17: Gal. iii. 11: Heb. x. 38). 2. *The earth shall be filled,*" &c. 3. *The Lord is in his holy temple.* The first of these three lights reveals the secret of our religion. It is *faith.* Faith in God's word, and faith in God's work. The second opens up to the faith supposed to exist; a glorious promise that all sin, misery, and confusion which now disgrace and oppress the earth, shall disappear, and make room for the glory of the Lord to take their place The third sets forth—the stay, the confidence, the breathless silence of the children of God, while the promise is fulfilling, and especially when the ways of God are dark and mysterious. Think of the circumstances and prospects of the prophet, and learn that God, in dispensing his blessings, takes seasons of despondency and thick gloom—that in selecting such times for predicting splendid futures he draws from the opposition of men and the infidelity of the Church an illustration of his irresistible majesty and unchangeable truth [*Anon.*].

Vers. 5—20. *Of shameful and hurtful avarice.* 1. Avarice is contrary to the order prescribed by God; therefore God must bring it back to order by chastisement (vers. 1, 6*b*, 7). 2. It is contrary

to love, therefore it produces a harvest of hatred (ver. 6*a*). 3. It confounds the ideas of right, therefore wrong must befall it (ver. 8*a*). 4. It makes the mind timid; but where fear is there is no stability (ver. 9). 5. It accumulates (riches) with sin, therefore for nothing (vers. 12, 11, 13, 17). 6. It seeks false honour, therefore it acquires shame (vers. 15, 16). 7. It sets its heart upon gold and silver and lifeless things, therefore it must perish with its lifeless gods (vers. 18, 19). 8. On the whole it provokes the judgment of God (vers. 8*b*, 14, 20) [*Lange*].

Ver. 20. Notice—1. *The privilege of the godly.* "The Lord is in his holy temple," to guide them by his wisdom, defend them by his power, and save them by his grace. 2. *The duty of the godly.* "Let all the earth be silent;" but they should acquiesce in his word and work. "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments."

"Wait, O my soul, thy Maker's will;
Tumultuous passions, all be still!
Nor let a murmuring thought arise;
His ways are just, his counsels wise."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1. *Watch.* We should *follow* providence, and not attempt to *force* it, for that often proves best for us which was least our own doing [*Henry*].

Vers. 2, 3. *Tarry.* For our actions let his word be our guide, and for the events of things and all that concern us, let his good pleasure and wise disposing be our will. Let us give up the rudder of our life into his hand to be steered by him [*Abp. Leighton*]. Prayer is the rest of our care, and the calm of our temper [*J. Taylor*].

Ver. 4. *Faith.* The life of faith can only spring from faith; as trees and plants do from their proper seeds. Faith begins here with a weak apprehension of things not seen, and ends with the immediate vision of God in the world to come.

Vers. 5, 6. *Desire.* Could you change the solid earth into a single lump of gold, and drop it into the gaping mouth of avarice, it would only be a crumb of transient comfort, a cordial drop, enabling it to cry a little louder, "Give, give" [*Royal Preacher*].

Vers. 9, 10. *House.* How few houses have you that those that are now in them can say, "My ancestor dwelt here, and these were his lands!" Go over the whole country, few can say so. Men when they build have conceits. Now I build for my child, and for my child's child. God crosses them. Either they have no posterity, or by a thousand things that fall out in the world, it falls out otherwise [*Rd. Sibbes*]. *Consulted shame—*

"Sin and shame are ever tied together
With Gordian knots, of such a strong thread spun,
They cannot without violence be undone."
[*Webster.*]

Vers. 12, 13. *Vanity.* To so small a purpose is it to have an erected face towards heaven, and a perpetual grovelling spirit upon earth, eating dust, as doth the serpent [*Bacon*]. The empire of the world is but a crust to be thrown to a dog [*Luther*].

Ver. 14. *Glory.* It is one of the greatest praises of God's wisdom, that he can turn the evil of men to his own glory [*Bp. Hall*].

Ver. 15. *Drink.* Seldom does any sensual indulgence come alone. One lust prepares the way for others; the first step is sure to lead onwards. The poor deluded victim cannot stop when he pleases [*C. Bridges*].

Vers. 16—18. *Shame.* There is none of you that ever entered this house of pleasure but he left the skirts of his garment in the hands of shame, and had his name rolled in the chambers of death. What fruit had ye then? This is the question [*Bp. Taylor*]. The man wakes from his dream, and finds that he possesses not an atom of the rich possessions he had dreamed of [*Lorin*].

Vers. 18, 19. *Idolatry.* Any opinion which tends to keep out of sight the living and loving God, whether it be to

substitute for him an idol, or any occult agency, or a formal creed, can be nothing better than the portentous shadow projected from the slavish darkness of an ignorant heart [*Hallam*]. While earthly objects are exhausted by familiarity, the thought of God becomes to the devout man continually brighter, richer, vaster, derives fresh lustre from all that he observes of nature and providence; and attracts to itself all the glories of the universe [*Channing*].

Ver. 20. A heathen philosopher once asked a Christian, "Where is God?" The Christian answered, "Let me first ask you, 'Where is he not'?" [*Arrowsmith.*]. The Will of God is our pole-star, and, with our eye constantly on it, we shall be carried safely through every storm and tempest of this mortal life [*Anon.*]. *What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter*, is the unvaried language of God in his providence. He will have *credit* every step. He will not assign reasons, because he will exercise faith [*Wilson*].

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Prayer**] joined with praise. **Shigionoth**] (cf. Ps. vii.); this verse posterior to the prophecy. 2. **Speech**] Report concerning God's judgments. **Revive**] Preserve, revivify (Ps. lxxx. 19): within years of calamity in which we live. **Known**] Make thy work known. 3.] These descriptions rest upon earlier revelations of God. **Teman**, Edom; **Paran**] (Deut. xxxiii. 2). God appeared from Sinai in splendour, which like the morning covered the heavens with light, and filled the earth with glory. 4. **Horns**] *i. e.* rays (Ex. xxxiv. 29); side (hand). **There**] In the light was power veiled (Ps. civ. 2). The splendour was the covering of Divine Majesty. 5.] He comes to judge. **Feet**] Behind him. **Burning**] Lit. burning heat of the pestilence (Deut. xxxii. 24). 6. **Stood**] as a warrior. **Measured**] As a judge (parcel out land, Mic. ii. 4), some; he sets the earth reeling, springing up as one in fear. **Scattered**] Broken asunder. **Perpetual**] Which never moved, now trembled, bowed, and resolved into dust. **Ways**] As formerly, so now: *i. e.* He follows them (Job xxii. 15). 7.] Neighbouring nations tremble at his judgments. **Saw**] in vision. 8.] Now judgment is executed. The description rests upon two facts: dividing of Red Sea and of Jordan (Ex. xv. 18: Ps. civ. 3, 5); and sets forth God the Judge who can smite in wrath the sea of the world and the rivers of the earth. **Salvation**] The object of riding; a warlike figure (Ps. xviii. 11: lxviii. 17). 9.] Picture of a warrior continued. **Naked**] Ready to shoot. **Oaths**] Promises to their forefathers (Deut. xxxii. 40—42). **Cleave**] Split into rivers by judicial interposition. 10.] The form of earth's surface is changed. **Mountains**] writhe; the abyss roars and raises its hands (waves); most powerful agitations accompany the theophany. 11. **Arrows**] Executing justice, turn light into darkness, or devouring fire (Isa. x. 17). 12.] Acts of judgment connected with the salvation of Israel. **March**] Solemn and majestic proceeding (Jud. v. 4: Ps. lxviii. 8). **Thresh**] Tread down the enemy (Mic. iv. 13). 13.] The end of Divine manifestation. **Salvation**] Rescue. **Anointed**] Not any particular king, "but the Davidic King absolutely, including the Messiah, in whom the sovereignty of David is raised to an eternal duration" [*Keil*]. **Head**] wounded. **Neck**] bared; the injury from above and from below; the very foundation destroyed. The necks of princes were trodden under the foot of Israel's leaders, and the first-oorn of Egypt cut off. 14.] Warlike nations meet the same fate as royal houses. **Staves**] The sword of the foe himself, the instrument of destruction to his armies and villages. Some, "that the hostile troops will slay one another in confusion" (cf. 1 Sam. xiv. 20: 2 Chron. xx. 23, 24). **Came**] with swiftness and violence, like a storm to destroy *me*. **Scatter**] The figure of dispersing chaff (Isa. xli. 16: Jer. xiii. 24). **Rejoicing**] *i. e.* directed to swallow the poor in secret (Ps. x. 9). 15. **Sea**] To destroy these enemies like Pharaoh's hosts. No obstacle prevented God's progress. 16. **Trembled**] The prophet describes his own feelings at the coming of Jehovah: first, fear and trembling; then, exulting joy (vers. 18, 19). "The alarm pervades his whole body, belly, and bones, *i. e.* the softer and firmer component parts of the body, lips, and feet; *i. e.* the upper and lower organs of the body." 17.] The trouble of the day described. The fig and vine, the noblest fruits of earth, plantations and fields yield not; folds and stalls empty through the devastation. 18. **Yet**] God is my inexhaustible source, and infinite sphere of joy. Strength] to gird me to overcome tribulation. **Feet**] Swift as hinds to escape the enemy, and reach **high places** of eminence and safety. Hence the formulæ at the end harmonises with that at the beginning. It is an ode of melody and joy (Isa. xxxviii. 20).

HOMILETICS.

God's Voice and Human Fear.—*Verse* 2.

The prophet had received an answer to his prayer (ch. ii. 1). Knew the mind of God towards Jews and Chaldæans: he now submits to God's will, but fears the threatened judgments, and prays for his afflicted people.

I. God speaks to men. "I have heard thy speech." If we are willing to hear the word and know the mind of God, we shall not have long to wait. 1. *The Scriptures are the voice of God.* They are given by inspiration of God—make known the doings, and set forth the requirements of God. The oracles of God speak to men in wisdom and truth. "Upon whatsoever this title and inscription is—'The Word of Jehovah'—there must we stoop," says Owen, "and bow down our souls before it, and captivate our understandings unto the obedience of faith." 2. *The Christian ministry is the voice of God.* God calls to men by his servants, but they refuse to hear. "Thus we learn the necessity of preaching, and what inconvenience follows when it is not used. Where preaching fails, saith Solomon, 'the people perish.' Therefore let every one keep himself in God's school-house, and learn his lesson diligently" [*Bp. Pilkington*]. "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us." 3. *Providence is the voice of God.* In times of judgment and revival, in national and personal providences, God speaks to us. Ponder the dealings of God, rest upon his will, and learn the instruction of his discipline. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?"

II. Men should hear the voice of God and fear him. "I have heard thy speech and was afraid." In ver. 16 we have the effect of this fear. The prophet stood in awe at the matter and the majesty of the speaker. It was not a slavish, but a filial fear, urging him to pray. The best men—Moses, Isaiah, and Daniel—have been afraid at the voice of God. When the prophet heard the judgments of God—1. *He feared for himself.* Ministers should examine their own hearts. Have they been faithful in their work, pure in their motives, and holy in their lives? "Unfaithfulness," says Bridges, "is to undo our own souls, as well as our peoples'." 2. *He feared for the Church.* Israel were the people, the special work of God (Isa. xlv. 11). He desired their preservation and prosperity. Ministers should be anxious for the glory of God, and the conversion of sinners among their people. 3. *He feared for the world.* When he thought of the threatenings upon the enemy, he was astonished at their guilt, and desired their wickedness to end. "The whole world lieth in wickedness;" good men fear and warn others of the consequence. "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments."

The Revival of God's Work.—*Verse* 2.

The prophet saw the impending ruin, wept for his infatuated countrymen, and wrestled with God to remove or mitigate the punishment of their sins.

I. The blessings desired. The revival of God's work, and the manifestation of God's mercy. 1. *The revival of God's work.* "O Lord, revive thy work." God's people were afflicted, and God's cause was low; new life was desired in the nation, and fresh favour to the Church. A revival implies deadness. Life may not be quite extinct, but feeble and decaying. What deadness, formality, and few conversions in *the Church!* The stones and the dust give evidence of decay in Zion. What worldliness and infidelity in *the nation!* Everywhere means of grace neglected, and masses living without God. As Edwards lamented before the New England revival, so we may confess: "we have been long in a strange stupor. The influences of the spirit of God upon the heart have been little felt, and the nature of them but little taught." A great necessity exists now for God to "give us a little reviving in our bondage" (Ezra ix. 8). 2. *The manifestation of God's mercy.* "In wrath remember mercy." (*a*) *Generally* manifest the favour.

"Make known." Make known thy power and providence in the world; thy pity and grace in the Church. Let us not guess at thy purposes. Do not remain hidden and unknown. Glorify thyself in the accomplishment of thy work. (*b*) *Specially* show favour to thy people. Mercy regards our misery. Sin will bring wrath and prevent mercy to us. But with God there *is* mercy. The sinner may be forgiven that he may be feared. God will *remember* or show mercy to the penitent. "The depths of our misery can never fall below the depths of mercy," says Sibbes. "It must be great mercy, or no mercy; for little mercy will never serve my turn," said Bunyan. "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment." II. **The time in which the blessings are desired.** "In the midst of the years" are emphatic words, and twice given. He does not say at the *end* of the years. He thinks it long till then. He prays for something to be done now. Whatever may be the remote future, God suspends the punishment, and gives room for penitence and prayer now In darkness stars may shine; in distress, deliverance be wrought; and in wickedness the enemy overthrown. God has a set time to favour Zion, but this is when his servants take pleasure in her welfare, and favour the dust thereof (Ps. cii. 13, 14). Trial days of the Church will not be prolonged one moment beyond the time appointed; but, meantime, comfort may be given, and we should renew our prayers for years which have to intervene and pass away. "Look then upon us, and be merciful unto us, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name." **III. The means by which the blessings are to be secured.** Man has many plans, trusts to various institutions and societies; but God has one way to improve the world. We hit upon a scheme; God implants a principle. "Revival preachers" and "revival meetings" may be necessary, but the work is of God. "*Thy* work." Instead of looking for new and unusual methods, let the Church earnestly use what she has. "Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." 1. *Private prayer.* We are guilty of what has been termed "the selfishness of the closet." It is not *my* family and *my* work, but God's work, that we must remember. Personal interests must not overlook public good. 2. *United prayer.* The first revival began in the upper room when the apostles were met together. In America a united prayer-meeting brought the wonderful change. "By prayer," says one, "we lay our hand upon the springs of an agency which can diffuse blessings through the world." 3. *Earnest preaching* must not be overlooked. Preaching, like Peter's address on the day of Pentecost, adapted to awaken men from slumber, and convince them of sin. It was bold and earnest, direct in its aim, and full of compassion. "It must be serious preaching that makes men serious," said Baxter. Ministers and people must be revived first, that they may revive others "Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. If the words be taken in connection with the prophecy, we learn that prayer and praise may be intimately united together; that the petitions of one generation may become the music of another; and that Christian experience varies as the dealings of God may vary.

Ver. 2. There are three things in this text—1. an alarming voice; 2. an appropriate prayer; and 3. a potent argument [*Spurgeon*].

We offer three thoughts. I. *Genuine religion is the work of God in the soul.* Genuine religion is not theology, not ceremony, but supreme love to God. This is produced only by God. II. *This work of God in the soul is liable to decay.* Many things tend to impair and destroy supreme love to God. Carnal influences, impure associations, social influences, and engrossing worldly cares Hence the prayer, "revive" it. III. *This decay should be overcome by a revival.* Revive, quicken, energize this love, and give it more force and influence in the soul. This is true revival. Not

the revival of crude theological dogmas, pietistic cant, and superstitious fears [*Dr. Thomas*].

In *the midst of the years* means just at the right time. He knows well how to find the means to render help, neither too soon nor too late. For in case he brought help too soon we should not learn to despair of ourselves, and should continue presumptuous; in case he brought it too late we should not learn to believe. *To revive* and *to make known* are nearly the same thing, only that to revive is to perform the miracle and bring relief; but to make known means that we should be sensible of and delight in it [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

God's Glory in Days of Old.—*Verses* 3—6.

God's former interpositions are remembered and celebrated to encourage hope. Past favours are the ground and prediction of future deliverance. There is no reason for despondency in our own case or that of the Church, if we think of the displays of God in days of old (Ps. lxxvii. 5). Mercy to Israel and severity to enemies have been resplendent as light. In the manifestations described we have—

I. Glory in the wilderness. "God came from Teman," &c. Paran is the desert region extending from the south of Judah to Sinai. Seir, Sinai, and Paran are near each other, associated together in the giving of the law (Deut. xxxiii. 2). The glory of Sinai is a type of the law which shall go forth from Zion to distant nations of the earth (Isa. ii. 3: Mic. iv. 2). The moral desert shall shine with the majesty of another Lawgiver. Nations shall be enlightened and blessed. The glories of the Red Sea and the river Jordan, in Canaan and the wilderness, shall be eclipsed by the triumph of the cross. Songs of victory shall be resounded from future triumphs. "The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors, unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills." **II. Glory in holiness.** He who came was "the Holy One." God and the Holy One are parallel phrases indicating the absolute purity of the Divine Being (Job vi. 10: Isa. xl. 25). In the giving of the law, and the injunctions to the people of old, we discover the purity of God. The outward splendours set forth the unsullied perfections of God. Holiness in God is not a quality, but his essence. The most glorious creatures in heaven and earth are only holy by participation. "There is none holy as the Lord." He is eminently, essentially, and constantly holy. "Holiness," says Hodge, "is God's infinite moral perfection crowning his infinite intelligence and power. There is a glory of each attribute viewed abstractedly, and a glory of the whole together. The intellectual nature is the essential basis of the moral: infinite moral perfection is the crown of the Godhead. Holiness is the total glory thus crowned." "Who is like unto thee, *glorious* in holiness?" **III. Glory in light.** "And his brightness was as the light." God dwells in light inaccessible, yet shone forth in rays more brilliant than the sun. 1. *Light which illuminated heaven.* "His glory covered the heavens." Not only the top of Sinai, but the broad expanse above. 2. *Light which filled the earth.* The earth was full of his praise." The wonders of his power and glory called forth universal praise. "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hast set thy glory above the heavens." 3. *Light linked with power.* "He had horns coming out of his hand." Horns are emblems of strength. The rays of light were rays of might, radiant as the face of Moses. The fiery law went from his right hand (Deut. xxxiii. 2); by its majesty and mission administered death (2 Cor. iii. 7); and yet was a type of the glory which remains in the gospel (2 Cor. iii. 11). The horn of salvation has been raised up in Christ to destroy the wicked and save the righteous (Luke ii. 69). **IV. Glory in judgment.** "Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet." Death and

destruction of all kinds are a great army, marshalled and directed by him in their mission. Pestilence and plague often go *before* him as heralds of his approach Judgments attend him ready to obey his bid. Burning coals lie beneath his feet, to fling upon the foe. "If the law were thus given, how shall it be required?" says one. "If such were the proclamation of God's statutes, what shall the sessions be?" If outward manifestations are so awful, what horrible tempests will be rained upon the wicked (Ps. xi. 6).

"Sinai's gray top shall tremble" [*Milton*].

THE HIDINGS OF DIVINE POWER.—*Ver.* 4.

Great as this "splendour and retinue" was, it was only the veil or hiding of his power. The excessive brightness concealed the Divine glory. "And there was the hiding of his power."

I. **Divine power is hidden in the splendour of Divine revelation.** As the rays of light hide the sun in their brilliance, so Divine manifestations veil the power of God. The garment of light covers his real essence and attributes. The works of God display his power,—the heavens his glory, and the earth his goodness; but one half is not seen. The secrets of his wisdom and power are double to that which is (Job xi. 6). He is omnipresent, yet incomprehensible. In his person and procedure there are unfathomable "depths" of wisdom and knowledge. His ways are past finding out. Notwithstanding nature and Scripture, reason and religion, he will still remain an "unknown God." "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" II. **Divine power is hidden as a discipline to human souls.** Darkness and light always meet in God. This invisibility of God—1. *Is essential to our free agency.* If God were visible to the human eye, and constrained us by his Almighty power, we could not be free. Like a parent God sees our ways, but leaves us to act as responsible agents. Too much light might overpower us, and throw us, like Paul, prostrate on the ground. 2. *Is essential to our moral discipline.* God's light will be darkness to those who wish to gaze into it. It will veil his love and mercy. His darkness will be light to those who wish to trust and obey. The hiding of his power may be for shelter or for judgment. We know enough of God in his goodness, and can never comprehend him in his glory. "The phenomena of matter and force lie within our intellectual range. But behind, and above, and around all, the real mystery of the universe remains unsolved" [*Tyndall*]. Angels veil their faces. Let us adore and submit to his will. "Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 3. *God came.* Ancient wonders pledges of future deliverance. Prayer will gather arguments for hope and duty from the storehouse of experience concerning the past.

Selah indicates — 1. The weight of the matter, not a mere transient glory. 2. The solemnity with which we should consider it. We must pause and dwell upon it until our hearts are duly affected. "There is no doubt as to the general purport of the word—that it is a musical direction, that there should be a pause, the music probably continuing alone, while the mind rested on the thought which had just been presented to it; our 'interlude'" [*Pusey*].

"I sing the warrior and his mighty deeds" [*Lauderdale*].

Notice—1. Who comes. God, Jehovah The Holy One. 2. How he comes. 3. What he comes for. (*a*) To deliver his people. (*b*) To punish their enemies.

Ver. 4. 1. There is much more to be known of God in his works and ways

that we can possibly know in our present state. 2. His perfections and operations are veiled, (*a*) to train the Church in faith, prayer, and humble dependence; (*b*) to permit the wicked to display their malice, and finish their iniquity. 3. Yet there will be greater displays of Divine power, and a glorious increase of knowledge far beyond what has been witnessed in the past. "O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have declared unto us, the noble works that thou didst in their days, and in the old time before them. O Lord, arise: help us, and deliver us, for thine honour" [*Litany of Church of England*].

HOMILETICS.

The Measured Inheritance.—*Verses* 6, 7.

These words describe the effects of God's approach. He stood like a mighty warrior in his conquering career. The earth trembled, and primeval mountains dissolved into dust. We take it in reference to Canaan. As Joshua conquered and divided the land, so God measured and portioned it out to people.

I. **The inheritance measured.** He "measured the earth." He measured the whole, and the portion for each tribe. It was no scramble, but appointment by lot and rule. He "divided them an inheritance by line" (Ps. lxxviii. 55). God measures the earth by bounds and borders to the various nations that dwell upon it. "Thou hast set all the borders of the earth" (Ps. lxxiv. 17). Lands and seas, continents and islands, are mapped out by him. He defined the shape and weighed the elements of the world. In righteous judgment he observes the ways, and fixes the bounds of man's habitations (Acts xvii. 26). He ordains our present lot, and will fix our final destiny. II. **The inheritance gained.** "He beheld, and drove asunder the nations." Notice—1. *The ease by which it was gained.* He stood in the midst of his glory, without going forth, and simply *looked.* What was the consequence? (1) *All nations were scattered.* Though strong and numerous, and their possession ancient and stable as the everlasting hills. (2) *All opposition was subdued.* At his presence, kings and princes, firm and immovable on their thrones, were overcome. The mountains were thrashed, and the hills made small before him (Isa. xli. 15). (3) *All enemies were terrified.* "I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction." The tidings of his wondrous acts threw neighbouring nations into despair (Ex. xv. 14—16). So now at the approach of God the sinner trembles in fear. Before his rebuke nations wither away. No shelters, no *tents* nor *curtains* can hide from him. "The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein." 2. *The deliberation by which it was gained.* "His ways are everlasting." This was no sudden, precipitate work. It was by the eternal purpose and strict justice of God. The works and ways of God are coherent, unchangeable, and true. They have steps and progress, but no change. His creative and providential acts are the same in all ages. "If God could change his purpose," says Charnock, "he would change his nature." "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."

The Chariots of Salvation.—*Verses* 8—11.

"The ode, taking a new turn, now passes from the description of the coming of God, to an address to God himself. To the mental eye of the prophet, God presents himself as judge of the world, in the threatening attitude of a warlike hero equipped for conflict, so that he asks him what is the object of his wrath" [*Keil*].

I. **The design of the chariots.** God was not angry with the rivers and seas. They were troubled on account of his appearance to deliver. He comes not to destroy, but to save. The chariots of Pharaoh and of antichrist are chariots of

destruction. From these God will ever preserve his people. When he comes anything will bring them salvation. God has many chariots. Clouds and darkness are his pavilion, winds and waves are chariots of victory. "The war-chariots of Elohim are myriads, a thousand thousands" (Ps. lxviii. 17). **II. The Driver of the chariots.** "Was the *Lord* displeased?" "*Thou* didst cleave the earth," &c. God himself is set forth in majesty and grace, clad like a warrior, and terrible as a judge. 1. *The Driver is angry.* "Anger" existed, though not against the rivers. God was "displeased" with the wicked, and his works revealed his mind. Insensible creatures reprove the impenitence of men, and tremble at the power of God. "What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?" 2. *The Driver is mighty.* "Thy bow was made quite naked." The sheath was laid aside and cast away. The arms were stretched, and judgments were about to be shot swift as an arrow (Isa. xxii. 6: Ps. lxiv. 7). *Quite naked* was the bow, and not drawn back. Power was really displayed, and the enemy destroyed. God is a man of war, shoots arrows with certainty, and never misses the mark (Job xvi. 12). "The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name." 3. *The Driver is resolved in purpose.* "According to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word." The promise was given to his servants, and confirmed with oaths. Judgments upon the wicked, and salvation for his people, are sworn matters; oaths, and interpositions for all ages (cf. Deut. xxxii. 40—42: Ps. lxxvii. 8). "The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant us, that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear." **III. The effects of the chariots.** The world of nature suffers under the judicial hand of God. 1. *The earth was convulsed by his power. Mountains* trembled at his presence, and "skipped like rams." *Rivers* broke out of the deep, and rolled their floods into the splits of solid earth. The *sea* roared, the abyss lifted its waves, and uttered its voice to its Maker. What happened to the sea happened to the river. God repeats his miracles. When great dangers are passed little ones should not terrify us. "Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood: thou driedst up mighty rivers" (Ps. lxxiv. 15; lxxviii. 15, 16). 2. *The heavens were eclipsed with his splendour.* "The sun and moon stood still (retired) in their habitation" at the prayer of Joshua, and in the tempest of "great stones from heaven" (Josh. x. 11—13). At the light, the directions of God's arrows, and the shining of his spear, Israel went forward. The darts of God smote their enemies. Their brilliant splendour brought salvation to one and destruction to the other. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera." But all these displays were eclipsed by the Divine perfections on the cross—when Christ suffered for sin amid the darkness and shaking of creation. How glorious the displays when the earth quaked and angels attended the resurrection—when the Holy Ghost came down on Pentecost to enlighten his people, erect his kingdom, and to avenge himself of his adversaries.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 9. *Thy bow.* The Divine archer. "The *bow* represents the threat of the vengeance of Almighty God, from which it is at length discharged, if not turned aside; the longer the string is drawn, the sharper issueth the arrow. So then the more the coming of the day of judgment is delayed, the stricter is the severity of the judgment then issuing" [*Pusey*].

Cleave the earth. 1. Divine power. 2. Divine goodness, in its design and abundance, *rivers* to quench thirst, &c. "He smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed" (Ps. lxxviii. 20; cxiv. 8).

Vers. 10, 11. He who fixed the world's pillars can make them rock in their sockets, and upheave the corner-stones of creation. The huge mountains are torn up by the roots when the Lord bestirs himself in anger to smite the enemies of his people. How shall puny man be able to face it out with God

when the mountains quake with fear? Let not the boaster dream that his present false confidence will support him in the dread day of wrath [*Spurgeon*]

Ver. 11. The judgments of God are a light to his people, while they are the destruction of his enemies; in them they learn righteousness [*Pusey*]. All the powers of earth and heaven, sun and storms, earthquakes and floods, subservient to God's purpose, and typical of his judgments. Notice—The ease with which they are collected, the order in which they are linked, and the destruction they create. This, a hope to the righteous, and a warning to the wicked.

HOMILETICS.

The Royal March.—*Verses* 12—15.

To march, is used of the solemn and majestic proceeding of Jehovah before the Hebrews (Judg. v. 4: Ps. lxviii. 8: cf. Henderson). The defeat and extermination of the Canaanites and the planting of Israel were the doings of Jehovah.

I. A benevolent march. "Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people." We speak of "the wanderings of Israel," but they were an appointed, well-ordered *march*, designed for victory. God, as Commander-in-chief, went with them. With his anointed instruments—Moses, Joshua, and David, types of the Messiah—he delivered them from their enemies. Salvation is the design, and will be the result, of all the doings of God for his people. The Church will never lack leaders, but in each we have a pledge of eternal deliverance by Jesus Christ. "He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." **II. A terrible march.** The march was not only in royal dignity, but in judicial power. 1. *Terrible in its aspects.* "Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses." In majesty, power, and splendour, the Exodus was the type of all victories present and future. Waters stand on heap, and the deep becomes a path for his people. "Dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name" (Isa. lxiii. 12, 13). 2. *Terrible in its consequences.* The foes, princes, and peoples, were overthrown, exterminated, and supplanted. He slew great kings and famous (Ps cxxxvi. 17, 18). **Much** more will God display his power to exalt Christ and overthrow his enemies. "The Lord is the saving strength of his anointed." **III. A triumphant march.** No obstacles impeded the march. Mountains shook, waters fled, and the lofty bowed before God's presence in his Church. 1. *Royal houses were destroyed.* "Thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked." Each head and prince which sprung from the family was cut off, in cities and villages. The *neck*, an emblem of dignity and power (Cant. iv. 4); stubbornness and pride (Deut. xxxi. 27: Ps. lxxv. 5) was laid bare. The head and foundation, high and low, were completely destroyed. "I will cut off from Babylon the name and remnant, and son, and nephew (grandson), saith the Lord." 2. *Warlike nations were defeated.* "They came out (were tempestuous) as a whirlwind to scatter me." Violent, powerful, and insatiable were the enemies. Pharaoh and Sennacherib came out as a storm, to sweep everything before them, like chaff in the wilderness (Jer. xiii. 24; xviii. 17: Isa. xli. 16). "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them." (*a*) *Defeated in their secret purpose.* "Their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly." The poor are not a match for the powerful. Hence their pride and confidence of success. But God frustrated their intentions. Their boasting made their fall more disgraceful, and God's care for his people more glorious. (*b*) *Defeated with their own weapons.* He struck through "with *his* staves." The destruction was not only upon himself, but upon the multitude of his subjects, and through an act of Divine might by his own weapons. The mischief which he had prepared for others fell upon himself. This has always been the case With the Midianites and Amalekites (Judg. vii.

22); with the Philistines (1 Sam. xiv. 16—20); and the inhabitants of Seir (2 Chron. xx. 22, 23); in the case of Haman and Daniel those who made the pit fell into it. Heathens declared that there was "no juster law than that artificers of death by their own art should perish." Fearful will be the future illustrations of this principle (cf. Ezek. xxxviii. 21: Isa. ix. 20: Zech. xiv. 13).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 12. 1. God's anger. 2. The report of God's anger. "Through the land." Not the mere land of Canaan, but the whole earth. 3. The fearful consequences of God's anger. "Thou didst thresh," a word indicating the ease and power with which this was done, and the complete subjugation of the enemy (Mic. iv. 13).

Ver. 13. *Head.* "He shall destroy at once, from above and below; overthrowing his kingdom from the foundation. From above, his head was crushed in pieces; from below, the house was razed from its very foundations" [*Pusey*]. The power, pride, and wisdom, the very life of evil to be conquered by God. "He smites his foes on the crown of their pride," says one. "The seed of the woman crushes the serpent's head. There is no defence against the Lord, he can in a moment smite with utter destruction the lofty crests of his haughty foes" (cf. Ps. lxviii. 21; cx. 6).

Ver. 14. 1. The end in view — "devour the poor." 2. The method of accomplishing the end—"secretly." 3. The feeling with which the end is pursued. "Their rejoicing." The rich boast in wealth, the mighty in power; but the cruel exult in mischief. The ferocity, craft, and activity of the oppressor, and the danger, snares, and helplessness of the oppressed, are described.

"Do not insult calamity;
It is a barbarous grossness to lay on
The weight of scorn, where heavy misery
Too much already weighs men's fortunes down"
[*Daniel*].

Ver. 15. *A second glance* 1. In time of ease we are satisfied with a cursory glance, a time of trouble promotes a deeper view of God's works. We seek relief, and find that we never dwell enough on them. Particularly, extraordinary works would be oftener remembered, so much doth the prophet's practice of looking over again on this act teach us. 2. It is worthy of our second and serious thought — both to honour God and confirm our faith—to consider that God's people are so dear unto him that he will change the course of nature to save them; that he can make them go safely, like conquerors, through affliction and danger [*Hutcheson*]. Take the verse as emblematic of God's ways. 1. Deep as the sea. 2. Swift and orderly, as horses yoked in a chariot. 3. Safe, though threatened by the "heap of great waters" boiling up as in a storm. "The immediate connection, however, shows that what the prophet has in view is not the Red Sea, but the hostile army of the Canaanites, which presented a furious and impenetrable aspect to the Hebrews. Through this army Jehovah is represented as *walking* with his warriors, as if a general were coolly to march his cavalry through the thickest of a proud and vaunting foe, which he knew would prove utterly powerless in the attack" [*Henderson*].

HOMILETICS.

A Song of Triumph.—*Verses* 16—18.

These verses form the second part of the ode, describe the feelings of the prophet under threatened judgments, and his exulting joy and confidence in God. Beginning with a sorrowful note, he closes with a burst of jubilant melody. The birds which thrill out the sweetest music, love retirement; so this psalmist—one of the most wonderful of human singers—sings out of obscurity. We learn that—

I. God usually meets the varied wants of men by lavish provision. Fig-tree, vine, and olive; fields, flocks, and herds indicate variety and plenty. We do not enter a world unprepared for us. Ample provisions were ready beforehand. Marvellous vegetation, fierce fires, volcanic agencies, and toiling waters were pioneers for human settlers. We have an attractive view of God's goodness and character when we think of him as the Provider. We evade the idea of a Father's bounty by speaking vaguely of providence. What is providence but the wise action, the benevolent operation, of gigantic forces? Good comes to us through laws: but who controls the laws? Providence is the chosen way of a loving Father's dealing. The Bible takes us directly to God, who gives lavishly out of "the riches of his goodness" (cf. Ps. civ.: Jas. i. 16, 17). Ample provision is made for our needs and pleasure—1. sensational; 2. intellectual; 3. social; 4. moral; 5. spiritual. **II. God must be recognized as the Absolute Proprietor in this provision.** The prophet contemplates famine, failure, and desolating death. Though God *usually* provides abundance and variety, he can reverse this action and suspend the course of nature (Ps. cvii. 31—43). Health may fail, friends be removed, plans be frustrated, and privation be felt. Dependent are we from first to last. Resumption of his gifts establishes God's claim to ownership. (Illus. Abraham's offering of Isaac.) The fig-tree without blossom, the vine without fruit, the olive destitute of oil; the barren fields, the smitten flocks, and the empty stalls; impressively tell us that the Lord God Almighty is the Absolute Proprietor. **III. In direct calamity it is our privilege to rejoice in God our Provider.** Ver. 18. 1. *A victorious faith.* "Yet." Note the *yets.* "Yea, they may forget, *yet* will I not" (Isa. xlix. 15). "*Yet* will I look again" (Jon. ii. 4). "I am poor and needy, *yet*" (Ps. xl. 17). "Truth Lord, *yet*" (Matt. xv. 27). "Though he slay me, *yet*" (Job xiii. 15). Change may take place in the manner of God's treatment, but never in his character. "I am that I am." If business prosper not, what then? How shall I find bread? "Man doth not live by bread alone." God asks for entire trust. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." "This is the victory—even our faith." This sublime confidence was nourished by—2. *A precious experience.* "The God of my salvation," are words that reveal manifold past deliverances. "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." Then, in troubles, bodily, mental, and circumstantial; in family trials, business losses, and painful bereavements; expect the fulfilment of the promise. "I will never leave thee." 3. *A noble resolve.* "I will rejoice in the Lord." "Those who have the Jehovah for their strength, should make him their song. Let the fig-tree be barked, privation be felt, and the worst come; the trustful spirit may rejoice in God, and triumph over all. In suffering we may say, 'In the night his song shall be with me'" [*Matthew Braithwaite*].

God the Fountain of Perpetual Joy.

I. Joy in anticipated trials. The prophet heard of a gloomy future, saw one support after another fail, yet his hope brightens, and joy increases as sorrows multiply. We cannot expect freedom from trouble. Nor is it often that we are permitted to see the future. No approach of foreign foes, no threatening of famine and failure of fruit-trees, loom before us. Yet how disquieted when business fails, and family prospects darken! We fear as we enter the cloud, faint unless we see the goodness of God, and never rejoice in anticipation of trials. Not at "the bright," but at "*the dark*, side" of things do we look. "All these things are against me." But through the darkness faith discerns the light, pictures unfailing joy, and exults in the friendship of God, when all things fail beside. **II. Joy in present afflictions.** The prophet not merely anticipates distress, but stands in the midst of it. Barrenness and failure, disappointment and grief, are actually seen and felt. But the sufferings do not freeze him into a misanthrope, nor sour him

into wretchedness. He is hopeful, and resolved to rejoice. It is said that Dr. Priestly was one of the happiest of men. The greater his trouble, the greater was his conviction that some special good was in store for him; the darker the sorrow, the stronger grew the sentiment that joy was to succeed. "Such a way of looking at things," says one, "literally converted every cloud that darkened his horizon into a shadow of good things to come." In all our clouds we may find sunshine and passing scenes coloured with future glory. "Now men see not the bright light which is in the clouds: but the wind passeth, and cleanseth them." **III. Joy in eternal duration.** If the soul be immortal its happiness must be durable as its nature. The world and all in it will perish. The man of the world deeply regrets loss in trial, but the Christian rejoices in God. Those who enjoy God in all things, can enjoy all things in God. Amid the ruins of nature, they are rich in him. When all created streams are dried, God is an everlasting fountain of bliss. When the granary is empty, an assurance of joy will be better than a "harvest home" (Ps. iv. 7). Christ in the heart is better than grapes in the vintage. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation," &c. (Isa. lxi. 10; xli. 16).

"Though vine nor fig-tree neither
Their wonted fruit should bear;
Though all the field should wither,
Nor flock nor herd be there;
Yet God the same abiding,
His praise shall tune my voice:
For while in him confiding,
I cannot but rejoice" [*Cowper*].

God all-sufficient in Trouble.—*Verse* 19.

The prophet now openly declares the source of his joy and strength, and predicts the safety and moral elevation of his people. In language borrowed from Scripture he expresses the all-sufficiency of God, the hope of support in trouble, complete deliverance from the enemy, and undisturbed possession of the land.

I. God is strength in weakness. "The Lord God is my strength." Strength to bear trial, and to triumph in conflict. Neither spiritual nor military soldiers can do exploits in weakness. The Christian is only a hero, and the secret springs of his courage only in God. If he strengthens, nothing can weaken. "The Lord is the strength of my life." **II. God is safety in danger.** In this language we have—1. *Deliverance from the enemy.* He is the God of salvation, rises up to judge the nations, and deliver his people. Assailed on every side, yet delivered from the strong enemy (Ps. xviii. 17). When rescued we must remember our weakness, and ascribe all to God. "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song." 2. *Pursuit of the enemy.* "He will make my feet like hinds' feet." Celerity of motion was deemed a necessity in the hero of antiquity. He must suddenly attack and vigorously pursue the enemy. Achilles was swift-footed. The men who came to David had not only faces like lions, but were "swift as the roes upon the mountains," to pursue or escape the foes (1 Chron. xii. 8: cf. 2 Sam. i. 19; ii. 18). 3. *Security from the enemy.* "He will make me to walk upon mine high places." As David cl...ed rocks and steep cliffs to be safe from pursuit, so God's people are sheltered in mountain fastnesses in spiritual war. They are swift to pursue and agile to climb. Ascending into impregnable heights we are preserved from falling, and made to stand where the wild goat can find no footing. "He maketh my feet like h...ds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 16. *That I may rest.* 1. Rest in trouble. Peace of conscience, calmness of mind, because the mind is stayed upon God in distress. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee. 2. Rest through fear. "The true and only path to *rest*," says Calvin, "is through such fear. Whoever is securely torpid and hardened towards God will be tumultuously agitated in the day of affliction, and so will bring on himself a worse destruction; but he who in time meets God's wrath, and trembles at his threats, prepares the best *rest* for himself in the day of tribulation."

"Nor peace nor ease the heart can know,
Which, like the needle true,
Turns at the touch of joy or woe,
But turning, trembles too" [*Mrs. Greville*].

Vers. 17, 18. *Fortitude in affliction.* "The power of habit and character," says Sir J. Macintosh, "to struggle against outward evils, has been proved by experience to be in some instances so prodigious, that no man can presume to fix the utmost limit of possible increase."

Vers. 18, 19. 1. God the source of joy. 2. God the source of strength. 3. God the source of salvation. In both verses we have dangerous positions, wonderful achievements, and secure dwelling-places.

Ver. 19. "*Mine* high places." The "high places" are called "mine," to imply that Israel shall be restored *to his own* land, a land of hills, which are places of safety and of eminence (cf. Gen. xix. 17, "escape to the mountain;" and Matt. xxiv. 16) [*Fausset*]. *Morally*, high places of knowledge, holiness, usefulness, and progress heavenwards—"heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Chief singer. Servants of God do not despise music, but only give directions how it should be properly used in the praise of God [*Lange*].

We too have our *high places*, of honour, service, temptation, and danger, but hitherto we have been kept from falling. Bring hither the harp, and let us emulate the psalmist's joyful thanksgiving; had we fallen, our wailings must have been terrible; since we have stood, let our gratitude be fervent [*Spurgeon*]. "The Lord was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord" (Is. xxxviii. 20).

"If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it" [*Shakspere*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Ver. 2. *Mercy* is wanted for England. The wickedness of this country belongs not to one class only, but to all classes. Sin runs down the streets. We have a fringe of elegant morality, but behind it a mass of rottenness. There is immorality in the streets at night, and dishonesty of business men in high places. Cheating and thieving upon the grandest scale are winked at. This city is wicked, and the land full of fornication and idolatry. I may not utter a wailing; but having heard the Lord's speech, I may be afraid, exhort you to pray for this land, and ask God to revive his work, that drunkenness and dishonesty may cease [*Spurgeon*].

Vers. 4–7. *Hiding.* Man's knowledge is confined to parts only of God's ways. The extremities or forthgoings of his administration are visible on earth only. The springs, principles, and anterior steps are above and out of man's sight [*Dr. Chalmers*].

Ver. 6. *Measured* the earth.

"Then stay'd the fervid wheels, and in his hand
He took the golden compasses, prepared
In God's eternal store, to circumscribe
This universe, and all created things.
One foot he centred, and the other turn'd
Round through the vast profundity obscure;
And said, Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds,
This be thy just circumference, O world!"
[*Milton*].

Ver. 9. *Bow naked.* The drawing of the bow was a mark of great skill and slaughter.

"So the great master drew the mighty bow,
And drew with ease. One hand aloft display'd
The bending horns, and one the string essay'd."
[*Pope's Homer.*]

Vers. 10—15. The whole passage depicts God's descent to help his people, attended by earthquake, splendour, and power. So tremendous was the shock of God's assault in arms that the order of nature was changed, and the bottoms of rivers and seas were laid bare. What will not Jehovah's *rebuke* do? Vain are the attempts of men to conceal anything from him whose word unbars the deep, and lifts the doors of earth from their hinges! Vain are all hopes of resistance, for a whisper of his voice makes the whole earth quail in abject terror [*Spurgeon*].

The volcanic phenomena of Palestine open a question of which the data are, in a scientific point of view, too imperfect to be discussed; but there is enough in the history and literature of the people to show that there was an agency of this kind at work. Their traces on the permanent feeling of the nation must be noticed. The writings of the psalmists and prophets abound with indications which escape the eye of a superficial reader. Like the soil of their country, they actually heave and labour with the fiery convulsions which glow beneath their surface [*A. P. Stanley*].

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

ZEPHANIAH.

INTRODUCTION.

The Writer. In all probability Zephaniah was a prince as well as a prophet, in virtue of his descent from Hezekiah, the pious king of Judah; who, aided and taught by another royal prophet, Isaiah, wrought a notable reformation in the faith and morals of the chosen people. In the title prefixed to this prophecy his pedigree is traced, through four descents, to a Hezekiah, and there abruptly terminates, as though, the name being well-known to fame, there was no need to carry it further. Ordinarily, only the name of a prophet's father is given. The fact that, contrary to custom, Zephaniah's pedigree is traced up to his great-great-grandfather, is an indication that this ancestor, Hezekiah, was a man whose name was held in memory and honour. We find no Hezekiah known to fame in the Hebrew annals, save Hezekiah the king; and therefore it is probable that the Hezekiah from whom Zephaniah was proud to descend, was that devout king who for a time arrested the downward current of the Hebrew story [*Samuel Cox*].

The Date. In the reign of King Josiah (641—610 B. C.), who, aided by Jeremiah and others, reformed public morals. This date is corroborated by statements in the Book itself. The fall of Nineveh and the overthrow of Assyria are predicted; he must therefore have prophesied before these events (625 B. C.) *i. e.* in the former half of the reign of Josiah. Idolatry was extensively abolished, but a remnant was left (ch. i. 4). "This exactly tallies with the state of things in Judah from the twelfth to the eighteenth year of Josiah; for though this monarch began, in the former of these years, to effect a reformation, it was not till the latter that it was prosecuted with more successful results" [*Henderson*]. At this time the state was corrupt as the religion. Princes and judges, priests and prophets, were alike in sin. Law was disregarded between man and man, and worship was profaned by Baal and Moloch. Prophets uttered not the word of God, but fine-spun deceits (iii. 4: cf. Jer. v. 13). With the mass of the people religious feeling was extinct. Thousands lived in scepticism and perfect indifference, indulged in lust and love of money, and declared that God would neither reward men for virtue nor punish

them for vice. "In short, the interior of the temple, which had been suffered to fall into a ruinous disrepair, was an apt symbol of the spiritual decay that was eating out the very heart of the national life, and unity, and strength."

THE BOOK. *Scope.* Zephaniah does for the two, what had been done by Hosea for the ten, tribes of Israel. Hosea is the first, Zephaniah is the last, of the minor prophets before the captivity. The contents of the Book correspond to the position of the author. They have a retrospective and a prospective character [cf. *Wordsworth*]. In its general scope, it closely resembles the prophecy of Joel. It traverses the same large circle of thought. In both there is, first, a threatening of judgment; then, a call to repentance; and last, the promise of a golden age of concord and peace. In both the history of the chosen race swells and grows into the history of the world at large. In both the prophet starts from the history of the past, and presses on into the future, until he is met by apocalyptic visions of a regenerated race dwelling amid the sweet bounty and peace of a restored universe [*S. Cox*].

CONTENTS. I. *The exordium* (i. 1—6). Announcement of judgment upon the world and upon Israel, arising from the evil condition of the present. II. *The description* of the judgment (i. 7—18). (*a*) In reference to its objects (7—13); (*b*) In reference to its dreadfulness (14—18). III. *An exhortation* to seek God (ii. 1—3). IV. An announcement of the judgment upon the *heathen nations* (ii. 4—15). V. *A repeated description* of the remediless misery in Jerusalem (iii. 1—7). VI. *The promise of salvation* (iii. 8—20). (*a*) The salvation of the heathen following the judgment (1—10). (*b*) The purification of Israel (11—13). (*c*) The salvation of Israel (14—20) [*Lange*].

STYLE. The prophet borrows from the language and words of predecessors. This "arises," says Pusey, "not as people have been pleased to say—from any declension in the originality of the prophets at his date, but from his subject." It has been said, "If any one desire to see the utterances of the prophets in brief space, let him read through this brief Zephaniah." At times he is concise and poetic, yet full and vivid in his pictures. "Joel," says one, "is the most abstract of prophets, and touches the history of his time at points comparatively few; while Zephaniah abounds in minute and elaborate allusions to the poetical facts and events of his age. And hence, while Joel may be read with edification by the simple and unlettered, Zephaniah is well-nigh a sealed Book to them until a scholar unlooses the seals and opens the Book." "The impressive, deeply impassioned severity of his style, well deserves that his Book should be designated as the *dies iræ* of the Old Testament" [*Lange*].

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **2. Consume]** From root; to destroy, utterly to sweep away (cf. Jer. viii. 13) everything (ver. 3). "The enumeration of particulars is designed to augment the fearful and universal character of the punishment" [*Henderson*]. **Causes,** idols, which made them offend or stumble (Ezek. xiv. 3, 4, 7). **4.]** Judgment, especially upon Judah. **Stretch]** Not only threaten, but exert power to injury. **Remnant]** Statues, images dedicated to Baal, domestic and tutelary god of the Phœnicians. **5.]** The people now denounced for star-worship and incense-burning upon the flat roofs of houses (cf. Jer. xix. 13: 2 Kings xxiii. 12); for combining the worship of God with idolatry. **Swear]** Acknowledge in public, solemn manner; openly to pledge one's service (2 Chron. xv. 14). **6.]** Two further classes mentioned—those who entirely apostate, and those who are indifferent. **7.]** Judgment speedily comes. **Hold]** A summons to silent submission (Hab. ii. 20); the reason given, **the day** near. **Sacrifice]** of victims of justice (Isa. xxxiv. 6: Jer. xlvi. 10); "nations consecrated to war, that they may consume Jacob" (Jer. x. 25) [*Keil*]. **Guests]** Lit. sanctified those invited (cf. Isa. xiii. 3: 1 Sam. ix. 13—22: xvi. 5). **8. Princes]** should have set an example of virtue, but imitated foreign oppressors. **Strange]** Peculiar vestments belonging to the worship of each idol (2 Kings x. 22); a violation of law (Deut. xxii. 5). **9. Leap]** An idol rite practised in the temple of Dagon (1 Sam. v. 5). **Fill]** With goods obtained by violence. The servants of the princes were eager to rush out of the palace, seize the property of others to increase their master's wealth. **10.]** Siege of Jerusalem. **Gate]** which stood near fish-market (2 Chron. xxxiii. 14: Neh. iii. 3). **Second]** A part of the city given (2 Kings xxii. 14: 2 Chron. xxxiv. 22). **Hills]** within the walls, Zion and Moriah. **Crashing]** Breaking to pieces of what now exists, not merely fall of buildings, as Isa. xv. 5. A cry at the threat of utter destruction [*Keil*]. **11. Maktesh]** A rock in form of a mortar, where they hulled rice and corn. "The name probably chosen to express how their false hopes, grounded on the presence of God's temple among them, while by their sins they profaned it should be turned into true fears" [*Pusey*]. **12. Candles]** Diligently and thoroughly (Luke xv. 8); the enemy would let no corner escape them. **Lees]** Quiet, retaining harshness, and growing turbid and thick. It denotes perseverance, confirmation in moral indifference (Jer. xlviii. 11). **Say]** Denied God's providence, put him level with idols, who did neither good nor ill (Isa. xli. 23: Jer. x. 5). **13.]** God proved to be ruler and judge, by giving up their wealth to plunder, and punishing them as despisers of his name (Deut. xxviii. 30: Amos v. 11). **14].** The hint of ver. 7 carried out further; the nearness and terrible character of judgment described **Great]** in effects (Joel ii. 11). **Bitterly]** For he cannot save himself from the foe; the might of the heroes and the city utterly fails. **15.]** All the words supplied by the language crowded together to describe the terrors of judgment [cf. *Keil*]. He first, as the day of wrath (Isa. xix. 18). The effect of wrath, **distress** and pressure (Job xv. 24): then a reduplication (cf. Nah ii. 11); desolation, &c. (Job xxx. 3; xxxviii. 27). Lastly, **16.]** "Indicating still more closely the nature of the judgment, as a day of the trumpet and the trumpet-blast, *i. e.* on which the clangour of the war trumpets will be heard over all the fortifications and castles, and the enemy will attack, take, and destroy fortified places amidst the blast of trumpets [*Keil*]. **17.]** No help nor counsel in this distress. **Blind]** Groping insecurely, or rushing headlong to destruction (Deut. xxviii. 29: Nah. ii. 5) **Dust]** Of as little value and in as great quantity (Gen. xiii. 16: cf. 2 Kings xiii. 7). **Flesh]** From a root *to eat*; equivalent to food (Job xx. 23) [cf. *Lange*]. "Their flesh here called *bread*, because doomed to be the *food* of worms" [*Drusius*]. **18.]** With silver and gold they cannot save themselves. No heed given to riches by the enemy (cf. Isa. xiii. 17: Jer. iv. 30: Ezek. vii. 19). **Fire]** will devastate; cause speedy and complete destruction. "A consumption, and that a sudden one" [*Calvin*].

HOMILETICS.

THE DESTRUCTIVE JUDGMENTS.—*Verses* 2, 3.

The people had been formerly warned, but heeded not; now threatenings are executed. Destruction, like another deluge, is to sweep the whole earth.

I. **The universality of the judgments.** The judgment of Judah is preceded by one upon all nations. The prophet was not of a selfish and bigoted spirit. He concerned himself with the fate of heathen countries, and proved that the destiny of the world was linked with that of the chosen people. As the result of judgment, nations will be converted to God (ch. iii. 9), and the world renewed and glorified. II. **The severity of the judgments.** Everything is specified and

paired, like the threat of old (Gen. vi. 7). The calamity will be as terrible as the flood. 1. *Inferior creatures destroyed.* "The fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea" 2. *Human beings destroyed.* "I will consume men." Man is the lord, not the helpless victim, of nature. All things are put under his feet, suffer for his guilt, and share his fate. "All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea." Dumb brutes cry out against human guilt. We should learn God's displeasure against sin when we see innocent creatures suffer for it. **III. The design of the judgments.** Joel (ii. 12—14) and Zephaniah were deeply convinced that all sorrows and calamities were disciplinary—that judgments were mixed with mercy, and designed to purify human life. God afflicts men to restore their souls. The wicked are swept away, and their offences with them. Sad when life itself must be taken away to cleanse it from corruption and guilt. But nations have thus been purified from idolatry and oppression, and thus will it be at the last day, when the Son of Man "shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *The prophet's employment.* To declare God's word, reprove sin, and reform society. 2. *The prophet's authority.* The word came directly from God. His doctrine not devised by men, but received by inspiration. 3. *The prophet's age.* "In the days of Josiah, king of Judah." In times of general defection, God's mercy is so great, that means are multiplied to reclaim men from sin. "Not *many* noble," but some are called to this work. Here we have a king, and the son of a king, engaged in the service of God.

Ver. 2. *I will utterly consume.* A tragical beginning of a terrible sermon. Hard knots must have hard wedges; hard hearts, heavy menaces. The doubling of the denunciation, collingendo colligam, importeth the certainty, verity, and vehemency thereof [*Trapp*].

Vers. 2, 3. "The besom of destruction" (Isa. xiv. 23) and the terrible sweep it makes; man and beast. Corruption and destruction, or the indissoluble link.

Ver. 3. *Wicked with their offences.* Wickedness, corrupting the earth—entailing suffering on the brute creation—necessitating Divine interference, and displaying Divine love. "I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled" (Jer. iv. 25: cf. xii. 4). "As God's acts of deliverance are connected in time with his *acts* of judgment (since his judgments are ever *separations* of the godly from the ungodly, and in this sense, *salvations* and deliverances), so also are the *revelations* of judgment at the same time revelations of deliverance, and the *faith* of the elect, which corresponds to them, is, at the same time, both a faith in judgment and a faith in salvation" [*Lange*].

> "O God! thy arm was here,
> And not to us, but to thy arm alone
> Ascribe we all" [*Shakspeare*].

HOMILETICS.

JUDGMENT AT THE HOUSE OF GOD.—*Verses* 4—6.

The prophet now declares upon whom the sore desolation must come. Even *Judah*, where God is known, and *Jerusalem*, the holy city, must suffer. Those most exalted are most responsible, and those who sin against greater privileges will be most signally punished. Judgment must begin at the house of God. Six classes are singled out for judgment.

I. Idolatrous priests destroyed. Two kinds are specified. 1. *Inferior priests.* "The Chemarims," priests ordained by the kings of Judah to minister at high places, or at the altar of Jehovah, with alien and impure rites (cf. 2 Kings xxiii.

5 : Hos. x. 5). "In either case," says one, "they were renegades from the national faith; *miscreants*, who, to earn a loaf of bread or to win the favour of the court, were prepared to stand at any altar and administer any ritual." 2. *Superior priests.* "The Chemarims *with the* priests." Those of the family of Aaron, Levitical priests, who have apostatized to idolatry. Such ministers are not worthy of the name and office of priest. Corrupt in doctrine, flagrant in practice, their very *name* shall be blotted out of existence. Ministers who pervert the national faith, and sell their birthright to gain the favour of the world, will suffer awful punishment. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land, the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule at their hands." **II. Idolatrous people destroyed.** Corrupt priests influence the people. From the ministers the judgments pass to the people. Three classes are pointed out. 1. *Open idolaters.* These blended the worship of Baal (sun) and Astarte (moon) with Sabæism or pure star-worship. The stars were thought to be originators of all growth and decay in nature, and rulers of all sublunary events (2 Kings xxi. 3). The house-top was chosen for secrecy, or to obtain fuller views of the heavenly bodies. This custom was (*a*) prevalent, and (*b*) popular. Public idolatry was individualized and adopted, family by family. From house to house, from street to street, incense burned and homage rendered to the queen of heaven. "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto other gods." 2. *Time-servers.* "Them that swear by the Lord, and by Malcham." They swore allegiance to God, but lived to Moloch or Baal as their king. To the service of Jehovah they joined that of idols, and sought to be on good terms with both. One of our own poets stigmatizes them, "as willing to serve God, so that they did not offend the devil." They thought Jehovah the true God, but yielded to the fashion and adopted the religion of the day. Principle had no hold upon them, and reproach was endured for present advantage. "Will ye steal, swear falsely, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods, and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name" (Jer. vii. 8—10; v. 7). 3. *Religiously indifferent.* "Returning behind Jehovah, drawing back from him, turning the back upon God, is just the same as not seeking Jehovah, or not inquiring after him. The persons referred to are the religiously indifferent, those who do not trouble themselves about God, the despisers of God" [*Keil*]. Notice the steps of this departure. They do not want God, and therefore do not seek him. They fear his presence might embarrass them, and therefore forget him as much as they can. Then they cast him behind them, abstain from all worship, and renounce every custom that would bring him to their minds. "Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee."

Four Classes of Ungodly Men.—*Verses* 5, 6.

I. The worshippers of nature. When men see beauty in creatures, and derive advantage from them, their hearts dote upon them, and are drawn from God. Men adore nature and forget nature's God. A specious and plausible idolatry abounds in our day. To honour a star is quite as offensive to God as to honour a stone. To worship the splendours of heaven or the wealth of earth; to love self, family, or business more than God is "to change the truth of God into a lie, and worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever."

> "They trifle with the truth, until, at last,
> Delusions strong as hell shall bind them fast" [*Cowper*].

II. The half-hearted in religion. By acts of solemn profession they worship God, and then try to serve the world. They pledge themselves first to one and

then the other, and try to serve two masters. This is morally impossible. The affections cannot be divided. One only can be our master, call him Baal, Moloch, or Christ. All men are made to serve something. The choice lies between Christ and the world. Compromise and neutrality are impossible. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" **III. The backsliders from God.** This class is too common. Many once started well, were firm in purpose, and kept their face Zionwards, but have ceased to follow after, and utterly forsaken the Lord. To go back from God is virtually to join the enemy. "He that is not with me is against me." Wandering is the natural tendency of man; but to wander out of the way of understanding, amid light, conviction, and privileges, awfully aggravates the sin. Watch the first step in feeling and practice, lest it fix you in a state of apostasy among "the mighty dead." Backsliding is the fountain of its own misery, and the most fearful of Divine judgments. "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." **IV. The practical atheists.** Those guilty of defection will soon live in total neglect of God and his ways. It is said that a sheep, having once wandered from the fold, never tries to return, but "wanders on still more and more astray;" so in many cases backslidings are multiplied until men are reduced to extremity and ruin. "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 4. *The remnant of Baal.* 1. Good men may be hindered in their work, or leave it partially done. Hezekiah's and Josiah's reformation did not clear away the idolatry of Baal. Moses and Luther did not entirely finish their work. "Good and evil have each a root, which remains in the ground when the trunk has been hewn down. There is a remnant of grace when the rest have been blinded (Rom. xi. 5—7); and this is a holy seed to carry on the line of God (Isa. vi. 13). Evil too has its remnant, which, unless diligently kept down, shoots up again, after the conversion of peoples or individuals" [*Pusey*]. 2. The presence and efforts of good men increase the guilt and the responsibility of any nations. 3. If these nations heed not their warnings or hinder their work, God may justly punish them for their sin. God will consume Judah for the remnant that remains. The reign of the pious Josiah preceded the doom of Judah, to deprive the people of all excuse. "I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

Ver. 6. *Positive and negative apostasy.* Positive, in forsaking the Lord for idols; negative, in ceasing to "seek" after him in real prayer. The latter is the forerunner of the former: many who do not go so far as open apostasy, are virtually guilty of it, for they do not "inquire for" the Lord. This verse describes more comprehensively those guilty of defection from Jehovah in any way. "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken *me*, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" [*Fausset*].

Seeking God. 1. God must be sought diligently to be found. 2. Men do not seek God diligently. 3. The natural consequences are, turning back, forgetfulness, and carelessness. "*Not sought.* Diligently sought him (Heb. xi. 6), zealously inquired after him, as after a lost jewel (Jer. xxix. 13) God will visit for unzealousness; and curse those that do his work carelessly, cursorily, in a perfunctory, formal way" [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

PRUDENT SILENCE.—*Verse* 7.

God's anger is not easily seen, nor his words laid to heart, by those who are most concerned. Hence warnings are given time after time. Judgments are at hand, and though men will pursue their own folly, yet God has fixed a day of vengeance. Sinners therefore should tremble before the majesty of God, who can destroy the rebellious.

I. **Hold thy peace, and do not murmur.** Sinners murmur at their lot in life; at the threatening and punishment of God for their sins. They deny his right and his providence over men. The righteous feel condemned in God's presence (Job xi. 4: Ps. cxliii. 2), how much more should the wicked! They are warned, devoid of every plea and excuse. The voice of Divine judgment finds an echo in every heart, "we indeed justly" (Luke xxiii. 41). II. **Hold thy peace, for God is present.** He sees our ways, and hears our ingratitude. "Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?" Hush! for if you would not like a friend or a prince to hear your words, why should God be offended with them? If at any time speech is silvern and silence golden, it is in the presence of the Great Judge. III. **Hold thy peace, for the day of decision is at hand.** Things which perplex and astonish will soon be cleared up. "The day of the Lord is at hand," and will speedily come (cf. Hab. ii. 20: Zech. ii. 13).

> "Thought has not colours half so fair,
> That she to paint that hour may dare,
> In silence best adored" [*Keble*].

IV. Hold thy peace, and submit. Submission is the most becoming attitude. The praise of silence has its pre-eminent advocate in Carlyle, who writes: "Nay, in thy own mean perplexities, do thou thyself but hold thy tongue for one day: on the morrow, how much clearer are thy purposes and duties; what wreck and rubbish have those mute workmen within thee swept away, when intrusive noises were shut out." "Thou, whosoever hast been wont to speak against God, as if he had no care about earthly affairs, cease thy murmurs and self-justifications: submit thyself to God, and repent in time" [*Calvin*].

THE DAY OF JEHOVAH'S SACRIFICE.—*Verses* 7—9.

Judgment is described as a sacrifice. The Jewish people are prepared, and the nations whom God has called to war are invited to punish them. It is not a sacrifice of joy but of sorrow.

I. **The feast is prepared.** "The Lord hath prepared a sacrifice." Such as set aside the means of grace and despise the regular offerings, only prepare themselves for sacrifice. When men do not repent of sin and offer themselves "a living sacrifice," they will become victims of their own folly. Blessings are withdrawn, and judgments prepared for them. "The Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea." II. **The guests are invited.** "He hath bid his guests." The nations whom God has sanctified or set apart are the guests. Nations and individuals, whatever their aims and passions, are called to execute God's displeasure. There is a kind of awe about "the scourges of God." They are sanctified sometimes in spite of themselves. The Chaldæans and the Romans, Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate, are constrained to bear testimony to God. "I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones for mine anger." III. The sacrifices to be offered. The judgments will fall with equal severity upon all rank. . *The royal families.* "The princes and the king's children." Great men often abuse their power, influence the people by their examples, and

become chief in provocation. Royalty is not exempt from responsibility, and will be reckoned with for its pride and wickedness.

"A flatter'd prince soon turns the prince of fools" [*Ben Jonson*].

2. *The noble servants.* "All such as are clothed with strange apparel." Apostate nobles and princes imitated royal families; mimicked the manners of the heathen, and adopted their costumes. "Their apparel indicated their treasonable leanings, their servility to alien monarchs, their addiction to heathen vices and superstitions." 3. *The servile retainers.* These were more licentious and cruel than the masters they served, lived by plunder and extortion, and leaped out of their own stronghold to invade that of others. Great men often think that their will should be law, and employ servants to support their prodigality by fraud and violence. But the obligations to God are greater than the claims of any master.

The Lord's Sacrifice.—*Verse 7.*

I. The sacrifice which the Lord hath prepared. The sacrifice of Christ a subject at all times interesting. It is the believer's feast and the sinner's hope. It demonstrates the love of God. Man has sinned, the curse was upon him. A victim demanded, and must suffer to expiate sin. This sacrifice could not be provided by the wealth of kingdoms and the wisdom of schools. Angels could not prepare it. Must then man suffer? Silence all around, but the Eternal cries, "Deliver him from going down" (Job xxxiii. 24). Christ is the sacrifice offered to the world (Heb. ix. 26). **II. The guests whom God has invited to partake of his sacrifice.** We are not left to conjecture who these are. Our Lord's parable (Matt. xxii. 1—10) and Peter's vision inform us (Acts x. 11—15, 34). 1. *The Jews.* God's chosen people, favoured with his will. They had a variety of sacrifices, which set forth and typified Christ, pointed out their guilt and expiation of it by blood. They had messengers in succession to call them to repentance; but when Christ came they rejected, persecuted, and crucified him. Yet after all this enmity they were invited to the sacrifice (Luke xxiv. 47). 2. *The Gentiles.* This sacrifice prepared for Jews and Gentiles, nations afar off, perishing for lack of knowledge. All mankind invited to the gospel feast (Isa. xxv. 6, 7: Luke xiv. 21—23). Christ gave himself for *all* people (Luke ii. 10); was a propitiation for the sins of the *whole world* (1 John ii. 2). The gospel must be preached to the world, that all may be saved (Mark xv. 15). *Application.* 1. All have sinned, need a sacrifice, mediator, and Saviour. 2. Such a Saviour is *provided.* 3. Pardon, holiness, and happiness may be obtained by all who rightly seek. Are you partakers of this great sacrifice? Come, sit with the guests, and take your place at the sacramental table. Do not waver nor doubt. If strangers, you are perishing. Feel your need, and apply *now.* Woe be unto you if you make light of it! "If he that despised Moses' law," &c. [*Rev. Thos. Jackson*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 8. *The strange apparel* contrasted with *the true garment,* "the fine linen, clean and white," granted unto the Church, which is "the righteousness of the saints" in Christ (Rev. xix. 8).

The dress may be taken as a witness to—1. The care for externals. 2. The power of fashion. 3. The state of the mind. 4. The danger of luxury. Seneca complained that many in his time were more careful about attire than the welfare of the state. It is extreme folly to be too anxious about either *material* or *fashion* of dress, to sacrifice comfort for appearance, and necessities for luxuries.

"Care no more to clothe and eat" [*Shakespeare*].

Ver. 9. *Those that leap.* Those who serve their earthly masters with—1. eagerness; 2. insolence; and 3. violence. Wealth thus gained is—1. unlawful; 2. uncertain; and 3. Divinely cursed. "Here again all which remains is the sin. They enriched, as they thought, their masters, by art or by force · they schemed, plotted, robbed; they succeeded to their heart's wish; but 'ill-gotten, ill-spent.' They *filled* their masters' houses quite full; but wherewith?—with violence and deceit, which witnessed against them, and brought down the judgments of God upon them" [*Pusey*].

HOMILETICS.

The Doomed City.—*Verses* 10—12.

The vision of Divine judgment which swept the earth, and settled in dark clouds over the land of Judah, is now depicted as falling on the city. Jerusalem, the metropolis, the centre of national vice and luxury, is besieged by Nebuchadnezzar The advance of the enemy, the ruin of the buildings, and the miseries of the inhabitants, are set forth in impressive figures.

I. The anguish at the gate. "A sound of crying from the fish gate." Massive walls and iron gates cannot keep out Divine visitations in the city; wealth and grandeur are no barrier to retribution in the family. God can disturb our towns and markets, our business and societies, and create want and anguish on every hand. **II. The desolation at the centre.** From the entrance the enemy goes on to the centre, or second part of the city. The second wall hinders not; the sacred temple and the school of the prophets are battered by rams and fall crash to the ground. When God assails, what can withstand! Neglect of duty and indulgence in sin will bring a fearful "cry of destruction" (Isa. xv. 5). **III. The conquest of the city.** When God begins, he will make an end. Judgments penetrate most secret places, and destroy the highest citadel. The horrors of the siege increase. The storm sweeps everything before it. The inhabitants gather on the surrounding hills, and howl at the devastation before them. "A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompense to his enemies" (Isa. lxvi. 6). **IV. The destruction of the inhabitants.** "Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh," &c. Not only the city in its grandeur, but the people in their wickedness are all destroyed. 1. *Wealthy merchants were overtaken.* "All the merchant people are cut down." The Maktesh (lit. mortar), in which they dwell, is a type of the method in which they suffer. They will be pounded and crushed. The silver with which they lade themselves will weigh them down to death. Abused prosperity makes judgments severe. It is folly to dream of safety in any place from which God is banished. Mercantile gains and heaps of silver cannot deliver men "in the day of the Lord's wrath." "They shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord," &c. (Ezek. vii. 19: Jas. v. 1). 2. *Men of business were carried off.* "All they that bear silver are cut off." The traders of the city had become very Canaanites in greed and gain (cf. Hos. xii. 7: Ezek. xvi. 3). The invaders seized the wealthy first, and carried away their booty (cf. ver. 13). Traffic and trade are good things, but are not the real basis on which a kingdom stands. When carried on by injustice and violence they will cause depression in business, failure in banks, and ruin in the country. God never allows any dishonesty to go unpunished. "By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted; but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked."

Divine Scrutiny and Retribution.—*Verses* 12—18.

God is not indifferent to human affairs. We may forget that God sees us, but the fact is not altered by our forgetfulness.

I. Human conduct is under Divine inspection. This indicates—1. *A thorough scrutiny.* "I will search Jerusalem with candles." When God comes forth—to make evil glare out by his fierce light—the secret sins and the secret sinners cannot be hidden. No hiding-place can keep out the light that makes manifest. 2. *The detection of the guilty.* "Men that are settled (curded or thickened). The imagery is taken from the process of preparing wine, and emphatically sets forth—(*a*) *The evil of carnal self-satisfaction* (Jer. xlviii. 11). Prosperity fostered pride; ease generated presumption; absence of dislodging changes resulted in aggravated spirit of impunity. This self-security should be detected; and (*b*) *Practical atheism* should be exposed. "That say in their heart, the Lord will not do good," &c. Practical atheism was the outcome of debasing indulgence. God's watchfulness, justice, and government were flagrantly ignored. His patience was thought to be unconcern. They talked in their hearts, held mental monologues, and charged God with being alike indifferent to do good or evil, to bestow blessing or visit with calamity. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Note the manifestation of a similar spirit in the days of the Apostle Peter (2 Pet. iii.).

II. Punishment is threatened for wrong-doing. "I will punish, because they have sinned against the Lord" (cf. vers. 12—17). God's anger is not awakened by trifles, neither is it disproportionate to the offence. The same faithfulness and power are concerned in the fulfilment of great and terrible threatenings as of "exceeding great and precious promises." The space mercifully allotted for repentance was nearly over. The day of grace was ending, and stern justice was drawing near. 1. *The punishment would not be delayed.* "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near and hasteth greatly." 2. *The punishment would be most exacting.* "The curse causeless shall not come." The penalty for sin may (1) make the sinner's labour profitless. "They shall build houses, but not inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof." The advent of justice may (2) render the offenders homeless. "Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation." Judgment may (3) terrify with manifold alarms (vers. 15—17). Retributions (4) make the whole land desolate. "The whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy." 3. *The punishment would not be evaded.* (1) There would be no exemption by purchase. "Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them." (2) The doom would be inclusive and complete. "For he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land" [*Matt. Braithwaite*].

The Diligent Search and the Certain Discovery.—*Verses* 12—14.

God will now come in terrible judgment, go through the city, trying house by house, and man by man. "As the vintner goes through his cellars, torch in hand; or as the head of the household, taper in hand, searches every nook and corner of his house before the Passover, lest any morsel of leaven should be hidden in it, so Jehovah will 'search Jerusalem *with candles*,' hunting the evil out of every dark nook in which they have concealed themselves, suffering none to escape."

I. The nature of the search. "I will search *with candles*." 1. *It is a determined search.* An earnest and diligent search of persons and places; a sifting one by one in every corner until the thing searched be discovered. The woman "lit a candle, and swept the house, and sought diligently till she found" the lost coin (Luke xv. 8: Ps. xliv. 21). 2. *It is a universal search.* None can escape. Josephus tells in the destruction of Jerusalem how princes and priests were dragged

out of tombs, pits, and caves, in which they had hidden themselves in fear of death. Ungodly men hate the light, would extinguish the candle, and hide themselves from punishment. But this is impossible. "Though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence." (*a*) *No bribe can avert it.* (*b*) *No strength can resist it.* The might of the city and the courage of the warrior would fail. So irresistible would be the attack that "the mighty man" would abandon himself to shrieks of hopeless grief (ver. 14). There is only one way of escape for the guilty: to examine his own ways, to condemn his own offences, and abandon all pleas, to trust in Christ. **II. The design of the search.** God searches the city, and penetrates the inward parts of the soul to expel darkness, discover guilt, and bring men to himself. 1. *To rouse the spiritually hardened.* Idleness and ease beget moral indifference. Men sit down upon their lees, draw themselves together, and get hardened in sin. They rest on the vilest, the sediment and refuse of their nature; become defiled by lusts, and confirmed in habitual wickedness. 2. *To reprove the practically indifferent.* Men who deny not God's existence may reason themselves into atheism, may wish and believe in *their hearts*, and by acts inure themselves into the belief that God is far away from them; that he does not govern the world; and "will not punish men with eternal destruction for the sins of this short life." God sits in heaven heedless of what men do or suffer, and will neither interfere in this world nor in the next. Why then fear him? Why not give themselves to lusts and pleasures? This spirit is rebuked by the prophet. If men do not see God in the merciful visitations, he will terrify them by judgments in life. 3. *To punish the worldly-minded.* Men pursue their ordinary course of labour and of sin, eat and drink, build houses and plant vineyards, until the day overtakes them, and deprives them of all they have (Matt. xxiv. 38, 39). (1) *They hoard up and cannot keep.* "Therefore their goods shall become a booty." God refutes men's notions by his providence, and makes them feel that he cares for what they do by taking what they possess, and leaving them homeless and penniless. "And their houses a desolation." (2) *They labour and do not reap the benefit.* They "build houses, but do not inhabit them; plant vineyards, but do not drink the wine thereof." God proves the verity of the threatening by his execution, disappoints men of happiness and enjoyment by his justice. If we forget God in prosperity, get intoxicated with pleasure, and revolt in threatened punishment, we shall be convinced of our folly. God will visit our cities and marts, and search our shops and families. We shall be frustrated in our pursuits, and robbed of all our possessions. "Thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein; thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof" (cf. Deut. xxviii. 30: Amos i. 2).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

The three acts of punishment. The *first* falls upon the princes who indulge in the customs of the heathen (vers. 8, 9). The *second* falls upon the rich (vers. 10, 11). The *third* falls upon the careless despisers (vers. 12, 13) [*Lange*].

Vers. 12, 13. 1. Ease, prosperity, and lack of change, beget false security, disregard of God's providence, and spiritual indifference. 2. God refutes the language, and makes practical atheists alarmed at his judgments. 3. When God strips any people of their possessions and abuse of them have been a snare to them. *Therefore* (*i. e.* because these things have had such an effect) "their goods shall become a booty." "Religion and morality are two spheres which cannot be separated. An upright heart can only have one God, and in cherishing other gods besides God lies a falseness which bears its fruit in the field of morals. Whilst the heart, in its profoundest depths, is actuated by two diametrically opposite opinions, it is necessary that those influences should finally neutralise one another. In this

will find that their enjoyment

way arises indifference towards motives drawn from eternal things. The indifference has a *twofold* result. *First*, temporal motives, among which the most powerful are pride (fashion) and avarice, take the place of eternal. In the *second* place, the other result of this fearless, practical atheism is: God does no good and no evil" [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

The Great Day of the Lord.—*Verses* 14—18.

To rouse the self-secure in their ease, Zephaniah carries out the hint of ver. 7, of the near approach and awful character of the judgment. The warning to Judah and Jerusalem should make sinners in Zion tremble. It is the day, the great day of the Lord, "a specimen of the day of judgment, a kind of doomsday, as the last destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans is represented to be in our Saviour's prediction in Matt. xxiv. 27."

I. A day of profound darkness. Darkness and gloominess, clouds and thick darkness. Everything looks threatening, and nothing encourages. No hope, no light. "The day of a darkness so profound, that day itself is changed into its very opposite and becomes a night, and a night wrapped in clouds through which no star can shoot a ray of hope." **II. A day of Divine wrath.** "That day is a day of wrath;" wrath treasured up for awhile, but now overflowing and irresistible—manifest, and felt in distress of every kind and degree, in calamity without relief. If the wrath of a king is like a messenger of death, how much more the wrath of an offended God? (Prov. xvi. 14: Mal. iii. 2). **III. A day of material destruction.** 1. *The cities will be destroyed.* "Against the fenced cities, and against the high towers" (ver. 16). Whatever the strength and structure of fortifications, they would afford no protection. 2. *The land will be wasted.* The blast of God will turn all fertility into waste. The dreary monotony of desolation appears everywhere. The earth is wasted with havoc, and broken into ruin. "A day of wasteness and desolation." **IV. A day of human misery.** "A day of trouble and distress" (vers. 15 and 17). 1. *Great helplessness.* (*a*) No escape by ransom; (*b*) no escape by flight. Men sink into anguish beyond expression; into misery beyond relief. 2. *Great blindness.* Hemmed in, they turn first to one place and then another; stagger like drunken men (Job xii. 25); and walk like blind men. Bereft of counsel, strength, and hope, "they meet with the darkness in the day-time, and grope in the noon-day as in the night." 3. *Great slaughter.* "Their blood shall be poured out as dust." Life was of no value, *blood* would be utterly disregarded, treated as contemptible, and spilt in abundance (Ps. lxxix. 3). Their *flesh* would decay, putrefy, and become offensive, and lie like dung upon the land. All this "because they have sinned." "The most offensive disgusting physical corruption," says Pusey, "is but a faint image of the defilement of sin." 4. *Great despair.* Amid darkness, distress, and murder, the war trumpet sounds louder and louder, strikes terror into every heart, and despair is read in every eye. The fire of jealousy devours the land, and "a speedy riddance is made of all them that dwell" in it. "He shall make an utter, yea, altogether (nothing but) a terrific destruction of all the dwellers of the earth" (cf. Ps. civ. 29: Isa. lxv. 23). **V. A day of speedy approach.** "It is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly." Each hour tells the knell of approaching doom. Conscience, Scripture, and providence, like the *voice* of God, proclaim that it is *near*. Near, adds the prophet, to impress us the more. It is at hand to each. It *hasteth greatly*, and may come before we are aware. Nothing will hasten it more than carelessness in sin and security in judgment. Prepare now, before its voice is heard; arise, ye dead, and come to judgment. "For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

"I see the Judge enthroned! the flaming guard!
The volume opened! opened every heart!
A sunbeam pointing out each secret thought!
No patron! intercessor none! now past
The sweet, the clement mediatorial hour!
For guilt no plea! to pain, no pause! no bound!
Inexorable all! and all, extreme" [*Young*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Vers. 1—3. *Consume.* The wrath of God is truly the terriblest thing in this world—the sting of sin, which is the sting of death. Alas! to us, God's wrath doth not appear in its full horror; for if it did, we should sooner die than offend him. Some do but think of it; few think of it as they should; and they that are most apprehensive look upon it as at a distance, as that which may be turned away; and so, not fearing God's wrath, "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath" [*Farindon*].

Vers. 4—6. *Remnant.* Baal was the Phœnician tutelary god. His name means *lord;* and the feminine deity corresponding, and generally associated, with him, was Ashtoreth. As he was represented by the sun, so she was the goddess answering to the moon and the rest of the heavenly bodies. In fact, it was the worship of nature; a worship to which correspond the pantheism and scientific exaltation of nature and her laws in our days [*Fausset*]. They offered the sacrifices upon the roofs, that they might be the better able to see the stars in heaven [*Theodoret*]. *Swear.* A neuter is a monster; he hath two tongues, two minds, two souls: he hath a tongue for God, and a tongue for the world too: he looks up to God, and saith, certainly thou art mine: he looks down upon the world, and saith, surely I am thine; he hath a mind to be religious, and a mind to save his own stake in the world too [*Brooks*].

Vers. 7—9. *Sacrifice.* The image was probably suggested by Isaiah's words (ch. xxxiv. 6). Jeremiah subsequently uses it of the overthrow of Pharaoh at the Euphrates (ch. xlvi. 10). *Sanctified ones.* By giving this title to God's instruments against Judah, declares that themselves, having become in deeds like the heathen, were as heathen to him. Jeremiah reports the saying (ch. xxii. 6, 7). That is, so far, a holy war in the purpose of God, who fulfils his will; hence Nebuchadnezzar was *his servant* (Jer. xxv. 9), avenging his wrongs (cf. Joel iii. 9: Mic. iii. 5) [*Pusey*].

Vers. 10, 11. These verses describe the state of Jerusalem, when besieged by Nebuchadnezzar. Through the *fish gate* he entered the city. It received its name from the fish market, which was near it. Through it passed those who used to bring fish from the lake of Tiberias and Jordan. It answers to what is now called the Damascus gate [*Henderson*].

Ver. 11. *Maktesh*, the mortar, a name applied to the valley of Siloam from its hollow shape [*Jerome*]. It is called by Josephus, "the cheesemaker's valley," and by the present inhabitants, *el-Wâd, i. e.* the valley, and also the mill-valley. The name "mortar" was probably coined by Zephaniah, to point to the fate of the merchants and men of money who lived there [*Keil*].

Vers. 12, 13. Neither the majesty of God, nor his government or glory, consists in imaginary splendour, but in those attributes which so meet together in him that they cannot be severed from his essence. It is the property of God to govern the world, to take care of the human race, to distinguish between good and evil, to relieve the wretched, to punish all crimes, to restrain unjust violence; and if any one would deprive God of these, he would leave nothing but an idol [*Calvin*].

"Even God's providence
Seeming estranged" [*Thos. Hood*].

Vers. 14—18. *Day.* When iniquity hath played her part, vengeance leaps upon the stage; the comedy is short,

but the tragedy is long. The black guard shall attend you; you shall eat at the table of sorrow; and the crown of death shall be upon your heads, many glistering faces looking upon you [*Hy. Smith*]. You can muzzle your fear, and you can silence your conscience, and you can go on making money by ways which God abhors, and which every honest man ought to abhor, and you can, in the mean time, have comparative peace; but there is a great difference between staving off judgment now, and staving off revelation and judgment then [*H. W. Beecher*].

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Summons to repent. **Gather**] As stubble (Ex. v. 7—12); then generally, to collect; in this sense, to gather one's self, to examine one's self. **Desired**] A word which signifies primarily, to turn pale, become white with shame (cf. Isa. xxix. 22); unworthy persons, not desired by God. 2] Reason for exhortation. **Decree**] (ch. i.). **Forth**] As the embryo, hid in the womb, is brought forth in due time. **Day**] Lit. as chaff the day passes; "the day comes like chaff" [*Keil*]. 3.] Because judgment will suddenly come, the pious exhorted especially, the quiet and humble before God (cf. Mic. vi. 8). **Right.**] Not loved strange apparel and practised idolatry. **May be**] Not doubtful, but difficult. 4. **For**] The punishment of neighbouring states a warning. Five nations, from all quarters of the earth, to indicate universality of judgment. **Gaza**] and cities of Philistines (cf. Amos i. 6—8: Isa. xx. 1). **Noon-day**] Not by thieves at night; but in the hottest part of day, generally spent in rest (2 Sam. iv. 5), and less likely for attack; hence sudden invasion (Jer. xv. 8). 5. **Cherethites**] Cretans. The connection of Philistines with Crete early noticed (1 Sam. xxx. 14: 2 Sam. viii. 18: 1 Chron. xviii. 17: Ezek. xxv. 16). *Cherethites* (from a verb, to *cut off*) were used as executioners in the royal army of Judah, and would be cut off by Jehovah [cf. *Wordsworth*]. 6. **Sea coast**] Lit. *line of the sea, i. e.* the region or coast along the sea-shore, and so called from the custom of using a cord or line in measuring off or dividing a territory (cf. with the same application, the coast of the sea, Jer. xlvii. 7: Ezek. xxv. 16) [*Henderson*]. **Cottages**] A proverbial description for utter desolation (cf. vers. 14, 15); shepherds excavated or dug huts underground to protect from the sun. 7. **Feed**] The Jews restored to their land, not any longer annoyed by Philistines, would dwell safely. **Visit**] in mercy (Ex. iv. 31). 8. **Moab**] and Ammon rejoiced in the calamity of the Jews. Compare parallel prophecies against Moab (Isa. xv., xvi.: Jer. xlviii.: Amos ii. 1—3), and Ammon (Jer. xlix. 1—6: Amos i. 13—15). **Magnified**] Acted insolently against their boundary (Jer. xlviii. 29: 2 Kings xiii. 20). 9.] The threat will certainly be executed. Divine existence itself pledged. The land shall be overrun with stinging nettles, and become a place for salt-pits, like the southern coast of the Dead Sea. A remnant of Jews shall possess the people themselves. 10.] The judgment is *talio*. The universality of it stands out with greater precision, according to its two-fold fundamental characteristic [*Lange*]. 11. **Famish**] Deprive them of worship and sacrifices, which were considered food (Deut. xxxii. 38). **His place**] Not in Jerusalem alone, but everywhere worship Jehovah (Ps. lxviii. 29: Mal. i. 11). 12.] Fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Egypt, with which Ethiopia was closely allied (Jer. xlvi. 2, 9: Ezek. xxx. 5—9). 13.] The prophet dwells longer on the heathen power of the north, the Assyrian kingdom with its capital, Nineveh, because Assyria was then the imperial power, seeking to destroy the kingdom of Judah. This explains the announcement, in the form of a wish, as the use of the contracted forms, *yet* and *yâsēm*, clearly shows. Assyria was north-east, but invaded Palestine from the north, hence regarded as situated thus [*Keil*] 14. **Cormorant and bittern**] or pelican and porcupine (cf Isa. xxxiv. 11), from whence the words are adopted [*Wordsworth*]. **Lintels**] or knops of pillars (Amos ix. 1). "The capitals of the pillars do not lie on the ground, but now stand unattached, after the roofs and floors, which rested upon them, are thrown down" [*Hitzig*]. 15.] This city, proud and haughty, sheltered behind defences of water, would become a lair of beasts, a desolate waste, a hissing to men. All would exult in its ruins, wave the hand, and declare that "she richly deserved her fate."

HOMILETICS.

The Call to Repentance.—*Verses* 1—3.

God had threatened his people, now withholds judgment, and urges them to repent, earnestly to seek and serve him, before the day of punishment comes.

I. **The necessity of repentance.** "Gather yourselves together." Men are distant from God and alienated from one another; dissipated by lusts, and live in forgetfulness of their highest interests. Hence they have no desire to turn to God, and are unworthy of his blessing; "not desired." They must be gathered into one feeling of penitence, one assembly of solemn worship, and one fold of God. 1. *The impenitent must seek the Lord.* Judgment is threatened against "sinners and their offences." The proud must be humbled, the unrighteous be holy, and the backslider return. 2. *The meek must seek the Lord.* The submissive and quiet must be more humble; those who do right must know more perfectly, and act more constantly. Meekness, righteousness, and holiness must adorn their conduct. "He that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still." 3. *The whole nation must seek the Lord.* National repentance is the only safeguard against national overthrow. An elect nation may become proud, undaunted in sin, and unappalled in danger. "A nation not desired," which does not blush in shame; yet a nation whom God urges to turn to him and live. "Seek the Lord, and ye shall live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph and devour it." II. **The method of repentance.** "Gather yourselves together." 1. *By self-examination.* A man must know himself thoroughly, examine himself closely, and ascertain how he stands in the sight of God. "Prove your own selves." As we collect stubble from the fields, so must we search with diligence, and pick up "the withered leaves of past life." The chaff must be burned up, all the dead and worthless must be destroyed in heart and conduct. It is better to judge ourselves than be judged of God. "Let us search and try our way, and turn again to the Lord." 2. *By earnest reformation.* We must begin with self-examination, and end with amendment of life. The first earnest search must be continued, until all sin is discovered, abandoned, and pardoned. "Bring forth fruits meet for repentance." "That vice may be uneasy, and even monstrous unto thee," says Sir Thomas Browne, "let iterated good acts and long-confirmed habits make virtue almost natural, or a second nature in thee. Since virtuous superstructions have commonly generous foundations, dive into thy inclinations, and early discover what nature bids thee to be, or tells thee thou mayest be. They who timely descend into themselves, and cultivate the good seeds which nature hath set in them, prove not shrubs but cedars in their generation." (1) *Sin* must be forsaken in act and deed. (2) *Humility* must be cherished. (3) *Righteousness* must be followed. In this radical change of disposition, attitude, and conduct, lies the sole chance of escape. "Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face evermore." 3. *By public confession.* "Gather yourselves" to a religious assembly, and avert the judgment by united prayer and confession. The Jews forsook the worship of God for idolatry. Many neglect to assemble themselves together now. If we sin together we should confess together. Religion renders social intercourse sacred, and binds men in public acts of praise and prayer. "Call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord." III. **The motives to repentance.** 1. *Danger threatens.* "Before the decree bring forth." Men suppose that there is no approaching peril, no need for instant amendment. But the decree is uttered, and God cannot change. "The error of one moment may become the sorrow of a whole life." 2. *Time is given for repentance.* Space is afforded before the day of grace pass away. Time, on which eternity hangs, is a light, uncertain thing. Like chaff before the wind it is driven

onward, and when it is passed the wicked will be overthrown. "They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away." 3. *There is now a possibility of escape.* "It may be ye shall be hid." Not much chance appeared to the Jews, but God discovered one. Judgment looms over the impenitent. The slightest advantage, the least hope of safety, stimulate to diligence in temporal matters. You may secure a hiding-place in that day. In Christ we have shelter. "A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest." 4. *If the season pass, helpless will be the situation of those who meet the day.* (1) Destruction will *be total.* "Before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you." (2) Destruction will be *without remedy.* The warning is twice given, to impress the certainty and speed of its coming. "Take heed lest that day come upon you unawares."

"God stays long, but strikes at last."
"The higher the fool, the greater the fall."
"In every fault there is folly."
"What is not wisdom is danger" [*Old English Proverbs*].

SEEK THE LORD.—*Verse* 3.

Observe four purposes for which we are to seek God, and which enter essentially into genuine religion. First, we are to seek to *know* him. Here religion begins. "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." "I will give them a heart that they may know me." Secondly, we must seek to *enjoy* him. In order to this we must be reconciled. He cannot comfort us till we are reconciled to him. We cannot rejoice in Christ till we have received the atonement. Then we can draw to him as our exceeding joy; our souls can be satisfied as with marrow and fatness. In his favour we live, and his loving-kindness is better than life. Thirdly, we must seek to *serve* him. He is not only our portion to enjoy, but our master to obey and wait upon. "On thee do I wait all the day," not only as an expectant to receive supplies, but as a servant to receive and execute orders, and to inquire, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" His service is perfect freedom, his work honourable and glorious, his yoke easy, and his burden light; and in keeping his commandments there is great reward. Fourthly, we must seek to *resemble* him. It is the essence of religion to be like him whom we worship. We are to "show forth his praises (margin, virtues)." God's virtues are God's perfections, and the best way to show them forth is to follow and exemplify them. We cannot resemble *his* natural perfections, eternity, omnipotence, and omniscience; but we may resemble his moral attributes—in our measure and degree be holy, do good, and forgive like him. "Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful." As we advance in this grace, we are "renewed after the image of him who created us in righteousness and true holiness." "We are changed from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord" [*W. Jay*].

THE THREEFOLD CALL.—*Verse* 3.

Divine judgments should rouse all to reflection, and lead them to test their thoughts and actions. The wicked do not seek God, but fall under his just displeasure. But the meek are exhorted to bend under his chastening rod, to seek him in outward ordinances and in active exercises There is a threefold call here, or three special blessings to be sought.

I. Seek the Lord. This is most needful and important. We naturally seek God in his works and word, in history, and in ourselves even. When we find him our hearts and intellects are satisfied. "Lord," says Augustine, "I have viewed the world over, in which thou hast set me; I have tried how this and that thing will fit my spirit and the design of my creation; and can find nothing in which to rest, for nothing here doth itself rest. Lo, I come to thee, the eternal Being, the Spring of life, the Centre of rest, the Fulness of all things!" "Lord,

show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." **II. Seek righteousness.** The knowledge of God must be evinced in holy life. "He lived his religion," was said of one. 1. *Righteousness with men.* If wrong with our fellow-creatures, we cannot be right with God. We must do justice and love mercy—fulfil the royal law of loving our neighbour as ourselves. "Charity is the scope of all God's commandments," says Chrysostom. 2. *Righteous with God.* This is more than a good moral life; paying your way, and being kind to all men. We must seek and possess the righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ. "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

"Their religion titled them the sons of God" [*Milton*].

III. Seek meekness. The virtue of lowliness (*humilitas*), known to heathens, was dignified into humility by Christianity. It is the first of Christian graces in order and rank—the very root of religion. Men teach us to cherish "spirit and pluck" in opposition and insult. Meekness is weakness in their estimation. But Christ demands it from his disciples. To be meek is to be like him. "I am meek and lowly in heart." "By pride have we fallen from the kingdom of God, and by humility must we again enter it" [*Starke*].

"From purity of thought all pleasure springs;
And from a humble spirit all our peace" [*Young*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. 1. We may read an invitation to repentance in the darkest times. "A fruitful rain falls on the soil through which the ploughshare has been driven. The gracious intention of the Divine 'doom' is disclosed." 2. All repentance begins and continues in self-examination. "*Gather yourselves*, so as to rid yourselves of all chaff-like vanities and sins. Self-confidence and corrupt desires are the dissipations from which they are exhorted to gather themselves" [*Calvin*]. Collect yourselves, and be ye collected—*i. e.* collect your thoughts, and look into your state of mind [*Gesenius*]. The gathering is opposed to scattering, dissipation, and distance.

"Mankind is broken loose from moral bands" [*Dryden*].

The precept is doubled, as it is likewise Num. iii. 40: 2 Cor. xiii. 5, to show the necessity of our doing it, as also the utility if well done; and lastly, our crossness and averseness thereunto, together with God's exceeding great desire that it should be done thoroughly for our greatest good [*Trapp*].

Ver. 2. *Before.* God's word is full (as it were) of the event which it foretelleth; it contains its own fulfilment in itself, and travaileth until it come to pass, giving signs of its coming, yet delaying until the full time. Time is said to bring forth what is wrought in it [*Pusey*]. Here are *three* cautionary "*befores*," as there are *four* comfortable "*yets*" to be read (Zech. i. 17). God yet offers them mercy, as Alexander did those he warred against, whiles the lamp burned; and as Tamerlane, whiles the white flag was hung out (cf. Jer. xviii. 7, 8) [*Trapp*].

Ver. 3. *Seek.* 1. The *objects* of search. God and holiness of life. 2. The *method* of search. (*a*) To work judgment, not merely zealous about outward forms. (*b*) To seek diligently, for the Hebrew form is intensive. 3. The *result* of search; mitigation, if not prevention, of calamity; pardon of sin, and hid when others are exposed to punishment.

Seek righteousness, seek meekness, i. e. further measures of holiness and degrees of grace. Let him that is holy be holy still; let him persevere, grow, and advance forward towards the prize proposed unto him, taking for his motto that of Charles V., "Plus ultra," further yet; perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. vii. 1) [*Trapp*]. *Ye meek.*

1. In times of decline God hath a peculiar eye towards the godly, and expects much from them. He leaves the wicked nations, and turns to them in exhortation and promise. 2. The truth and reality of their graces must be manifest in humility of spirit, subjection to the word, fear of judgments, and tenderness towards others. 3. Then God puts their safety beyond all doubt. 4. Hence, in dangers, uncertainties, and troubles, they must seek him, trust his goodness and grace [*Hutcheson*].

HOMILETICS.

The Judgment upon the Philistines.—*Verses* 4—7.

Punishment to neighbouring states is now threatened. Under five nations all mankind are included. The Philistines, as a near malicious enemy, are mentioned first. "Out of the five cities, woe is pronounced upon the same four as Amos (i. 6—8) before, Jeremiah soon after (xxv. 20), and Zechariah (ix. 5, 6) later. Gath, the fifth, had probably remained with Judah since Uzziah and Hezekiah (2 Chron. xxvi. 6 : 2 Kings xviii. 8). The name of the place itself is regarded in the sentence, that it may suggest the thought of the doom pronounced upon it. The names expressed boastfulness, and so, in the Divine judgment, carried their own sentence with them, and this sentence is pronounced by a slight change in the word" [*Pusey*]. The four capitals include the whole territory and people.

I. The splendid cities will be destroyed. The chief cities are threatened with open and violent attack, with entire desolation and depopulation. 1. *Gaza shall be forsaken* (*Azzah*, strong, shall be, *Azoobah*, *desolated*). Though strong, and able to resist the conqueror for four or five months, its defenders perished in the battle. Alexander sold its inhabitants, and repeopled it from the neighbourhood. 2. *Ekron shall be uprooted* (*Ekron*, deep rooting, shall be *Te-aker*, rooted out). Not a vestige of the place is now left. It is only known by name, say travellers. Man builds, and God pulls down. Man plants, and God uproots. The most flourishing trade, the most deeply-rooted society, may be torn out of the soil and carried away. 3. *Ashkelon shall become a desolation.* The present city is a ghastly skeleton. The soil is good, but peasants who cultivate it live outside in mud-huts, under the impression that God has left the place and permitted evil spirits to dwell there. 4. *Ashdod shall be suddenly overtaken.* "They (the enemies) shall drive out Ashdod at the noon-day." The power of Dagon (1 Sam. v.) could not defend it. When its inhabitants were taking repose and sleep, and thought themselves most secure—when evil was least expected, it would prove most fatal. The judgments of God would suddenly overtake them. Neither antiquity nor valour, neither natural strength nor the power of their gods, would protect these cities. The word of God was against them, and their doom was inevitable. "I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, which shall devour the palaces thereof; and I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him that holdeth the sceptre from Ashkelon, and I will turn mine hand against Ekron : and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord God." **II. The whole population will be taken away.** "Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea-coast." Every epithet in ver. 5 is selected with a view of deepening the gloom of terrible denunciation. "The terrors are encompassed by hints drawn from the latent omen of the Kerethite name, and from the ancient Canaanite traditions." 1. *The fertility of the land would be cursed.* Shepherds will dig it up to build their huts, and shelter their flocks. 2. *Seats of industry will be abandoned.* 3. *The country would be repeopled.* "This once fertile tract by the sea, thickly dotted with the crowded hives of human industry, with fair cities inhabited by free brave men, afterwards a desert, accursed by God, and abandoned by man, '*shall become pastures, with huts for shepherds, and folds for sheep.*' Through the mountain gorges the flocks of the restored Hebrews will

descend on the green flowery plains, knowing no want, fearing no evil, because the shepherds go before them with staff and rod" [*S. Cox*]. "I will even destroy thee that there shall be no inhabitant." "In that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 4. The judgments threatened upon others an argument for the ungodly to repent, and for the godly to persevere in well-doing, that they may escape the general calamity.

Vers. 5, 6. *Woe.* 1. The *source* of the woe. "The word of the Lord." 2. The *cause* of the woe. They were of the posterity, possessed the land, and inherited the sins of Canaan. 3. The *consequences* of the woe. (1) Destruction. (2) Universal destruction. "*Woe* to the people who have the word of God against them. To them he speaketh not in good, but in evil; not in grace, but in anger; not in mercy, but in vengeance" [*Pusey*].

Ver. 7. The fall of the enemy, the restoration of the elect of Israel. The remnant of Baal driven out, to make room for the remnant of God. Notice —1. *The blessings bestowed.* (1) *Visited* by God. "The Lord their God shall visit them." In mercy and loving-kindness (Ex. iv. 31). (2) *Delivered.* "And turn away their captivity." (3) *Restored to possession.* "His visits are not empty visits (Ps. viii. 5); his favours are not like the winter sun, that lighteth but heateth not" [*Trapp*]. 2. *The source of the blessings.* The covenant of "the Lord *their* God." Covenant rights will not fail, after long delay and many disappointments. 3. *The method of securing the blessings.* After captivity and calamity. Through much tribulation we enter heaven. But the word is sure. "Be thou faithful."

In chap. i. vers. 8, 9, God had *threatened* to "visit" the men of Judah and Jerusalem; now he *promises* to "visit" them: the same Heb. verb used in both places; but now by a slight change of construction (*páquad*, construed with an accusative of the person instead of with *al*), the verb itself shows that God is about to visit them in grace. And the grammatical hint is expanded in the words which follow: God is about to *visit* them, that he may "*turn their captivity*," as he turned that of Job, by giving them freedom for bondage, peace for war, wealth for want. The peace and abundance of this happier time are charmingly expressed in the opening clauses of ver. 7 [*S. Cox*].

HOMILETICS.

The Judgment upon the Moabites.—*Verses* 8—10.

Moab and Ammon were of blood relation to Israel. Their country adjoined Canaan, and from the time of Balak they were always reviling Israel, and invading their territory, and plundering their cities. The pride and insolence of Ammon were proverbial. They were now to be punished for their conduct.

I. The nature of their doom. Their land was to be spoiled, and their cities exterminated. 1. *The tribes would be destroyed.* They would incur a fate like Sodom and Gomorrah, which are ingulfed in the Dead Sea. 2. *The land would be cursed. Nettles* would infest it, *salt-pits* would tear it up, and desolation would be *perpetual.* Destruction, barrenness, and extinction beyond recovery (Jer. xlix. 18). "The whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning: it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein; like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in his anger and in his wrath." II. The certainty of their doom. "Therefore as I live, saith the Lord of hosts." Jehovah pledges himself by solemn oath to inflict the destruction. When God threatens men seem slow to believe that he is in earnest. When he

appeals to his own existence in support of his truth they should fear. "Because he could swear by no greater he swears by himself." **III. The cause of their doom.** 1. *Their pride.* "This shall they have for their pride." Pride and arrogance are specially offensive to God. When men magnify themselves against the people of God and their possessions, they magnify themselves against God. God will bring them low, and give them shame and contempt. 2. *Their cruelty.* They reviled and reproached the people of God (ver. 8); took pleasure in their misfortunes; cherished constant hatred towards them; and violated their land age after age. Pride begets insolence and cruelty, and these expose to the judgment of God. "It is a dangerous indiscretion for a man not to know the bounds of his own calling" [*Bp. Hall*]. "A man's pride shall bring him him low."

"My pride fell with my fortunes" [*As you like it*].

THE LIVING GOD.—*Verses* 8—11.

"I live." God here declares his eternal self-existence. "In the beginning God." The living God is not indifferent to human affairs; neither does he keep silence. He has entered into relationships and covenants indicated by the name, "the God of Israel," revealed his majestic power, and triumphed gloriously over the rebellious. "The Lord, strong and mighty." This God has spoken, linked his sayings with his character, and made them emphatic by an oath.

I. The living God is cognisant of all that transpires on earth. "I have heard." Nothing escapes the eyes of God. "All things are naked and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do." God is an ever-present listener (whispering gallery: telephone). 1. *God hears the mockery of evil tongues.* "I have heard the reproach of Moab," &c. How painful for us to hear all the slanders, curses, and blasphemies of one day! Yet God hears all the evil-speaking of men through all time. The God of patience may bear long with personal and national provocations, but he feels, and expresses feeling in words. "As I live, saith the Lord of hosts." This brings out the idea—2. *That God is affected by the injury done to his people.* This truth was unfolded to Moses when commanded to go to Egypt (Ex. iii. 7—10). Note how the exalted, living Christ identifies himself with his persecuted people. (Acts ix. 1—4). This truth should comfort and sustain, "when men shall revile you, and persecute you," &c. **II. The living God administers timely justice.** Nations only exist in time, and so in time punishment takes place. We are dealt with as individuals before the judgment-seat of Christ. Moab and Ammon, for repeated and persistent offences, are threatened with Divine judgments. God's words soon become God's works, notwithstanding seeming hindrances and impossibilities. The guilt was great and grievous. Observe—1. *The severity of the Divine judgment.* "Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah." We have no encouragement from the history of nations to regard God's mercy as amiable weakness, or his judgments as harsh and vindictive. "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." Under his righteous administration, and in the execution of judgment for the oppressed, light words may bring heavy blows, and defiant tones desolating retributions. Cause and effect, sin and suffering, are here connected. 2. *The Divine judgment was the penalty of pride and arrogance.* "This shall they have for their pride," &c. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Illustrations:—Goliath (1 Sam. xvii.); Benhadad (1 Kings xx.); Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. iv.); Babylon (Isa. xlvii.). **III. The living God is jealous of his name and worship.** "The Lord will be terrible unto them; for he will famish all the gods of the earth," &c. An *eidōlon* is a thing that can be seen and put for a being who cannot be seen. God is a spirit, and no image can represent a spirit. He prohibits the attempt to make a "likeness" of himself (Ex. xx.). The maledictions upon this sin are numerous

and startling. It is specially offensive and insulting to the one living and true God. With the most horrible, inhuman, and debasing rites, Moab and Ammon worshipped gods, and left the infamous names of Chemosh, Molech, Milcom, and Peor. 1. *Idolatry is a flagrant insult to the living God.* 2. *God declares his intention to exterminate it.* "For he will famish all the gods of the earth." The triumphs of Divine truth over idolatry have been signal and complete. Islands and countries have abolished their idols. The process goes on and must continue, for he hath said, "I am God, and there is none like me." "The idols he shall utterly abolish." 3. *God predicts the universality of true and acceptable worship.* Jealous for his character, God will tolerate no rival. The heathen gods shall be without offerings and devotees. The destructive work is to prepare for the constructive, or rather the true worship is to displace the false. "Men shall worship Him, every one from his place," &c. However prevalent, mighty, and venerable idol worship may be in some places, it is doomed. Whether slowly or rapidly men "turn from idols to serve the living God," the promise must be accomplished. "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him." The predicted universality of acceptable worship should (*a*) Incite the Church of God to pray earnestly, "thy kingdom come;" and (*b*) Inspire unceasing aggressive efforts, until "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ" [*Mt. Braithwaite*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 8. 1. No relation will bind the wicked to the Church, and in sympathy with the godly. However near, they break loose, persecute, and revile them. 2. But God takes notice of this conduct towards his people, declares his love, and determines to punish their enemies. Chastisement does not hinder affection for them. *I have heard the reproach.* "The memory of God is one of the most fearful things of which a man can think. He notices particularly the dishonour done to his people, because they only take no heed of dishonour, and are not allowed to defend themselves. But take heed that you are not reviled on account of your own sins. Such reviling God does not punish, but it is itself punishment" [*Lange*].

Ver. 11. The extermination of idolatry, and the establishment of God's worship. 1. *Idolatry to be exterminated.* "For he will famish all the gods of the earth." They will die from want and starvation. There will be a gradual and universal destruction of idols. This happened in the days of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, who chastised the Jews and weaned them from heathen deities; in the early age of Christianity, and in modern missions. 2. *Divine worship to be established.* Not only at Jerusalem but universally. "Men shall worship him, every one from his own place." His own Gentile *home* taught by Jews in the true religion. "All the isles of the heathen,"—the maritime regions of the West. This prediction is being fulfilled at present; and ere long, "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering" (Mal. i. 11: Ps. ii. 8: Num. xiv. 21).

HOMILETICS.

The Judgments of God a Scheme of Redemption.—*Verse* 11.

"The immense value of this verse consists in the fact that it reveals a law, a constant invariable law, of the Divine government. It stands alone and is complete. It is a place of vantage, a point of rest, to which the prophet has risen, and from which he contemplates not simply the doom of which he has spoken, or

the dooms of which he is about to speak, but the whole course of the Divine providence. And as he looks before and after, as he recalls the past and projects himself into the future, he finds *this* to be a law of human history, that the judgments of God are a necessary part of the scheme of redemption: that God intends them to recover men from error to truth, from sin to holiness" [*S. Cox*]. Let us trace this thought—

I. In human experience. God often visits in terror, smites our gods, and takes away what is dearest and most valuable. This terror brings torment and despair. The darkness hides the light, and the judgment the mercy. God is terrible indeed to us. But how else could we be weaned from sin, delivered from idolatry, and restored to God? *Threatenings* have been unheeded, *mercies* have been abused, and *promises* are of no avail. Severe measures must be adopted. "Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O Lord." **II. In the history of the Christian Church.** In the Jewish nation, in apostolic times and in modern history, this truth is abundantly confirmed. The Church has been purified by persecution, and nations have been saved by the famishing of their gods. "These judgments," says one, "answer to the convulsions and storms of the natural world, and serve to disperse the foul infections which brood over the homes of men, to raise them to happier conditions, and to pour round them a more vital air." God thus starves idols to make known himself, clothes himself in terrors to redeem from error, and reveals mercy to win "the isles of the heathen." "For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."

THE DOOM OF ETHIOPIA.—*Verse* 12.

"Zephaniah has to complete his circuit. He has travelled East and West, and now completes his round by denouncing judgment on the nations of the North and South. At the South he merely aims a blow in passing; but it is curious to note how far it reaches. He travels to the utmost limit of his knowledge, and hurls his curt ringing anathema at *Cush* or Ethiopia, the southernmost kingdom known to the Hebrews." Notice—

I. That the enemies of the Church, though numerous and far distant, will be found out and punished. Philistia, Moab, and Ammon escape not. The sword passes Edom, a constant enemy, immediately south to Judah. Egypt, insolent and more southern still, is not mentioned. But far away the judgment sweeps to remote Ethiopia. "Ye Ethiopians also." **II. That in the punishment of these enemies the hand of God must be recognized.** "Slain by *my* sword." All nations and individuals are God's instruments, and under his control. The most powerful and profane are under the rule and wielded by the hand of God. None can annoy and act without his permission. All things are as easily managed as a sword in the hand. Hence learn (*a*) to submit to God in the persecution by wicked men; and (*b*) to discern his power and use of them. "Deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword."

THE JUDGMENT UPON ASSYRIA.—*Verses* 13—15.

The prophet dwells upon the kingdom of Assyria with its splendid capital, Nineveh. It was the imperial power then seeking to destroy Judah. But the sentence of Jonah and Nahum was to be executed. No opportunity of repentance now. The most populous and ambitious kingdom of Eastern races has to be entirely laid waste.

I. Its capital would become a heap of ruins. God will stretch out his hand "and destroy Assyria, and will make Nineveh a desolation." Nineveh, strongly built and splendidly adorned, secure in its streams and impregnable in its defences, would become an arid waste. "Dry like a wilderness." **II. Its ruins would be complete.** They would become—1. *A lair of wild beasts.*

"Herds crouch were once ran broad streets, loud with the wheels of traffic or the tramp of armies. Wild beasts wander and climb about the fallen stones, seeking a prey or finding a covert within its dismantled walls. Pelicans from the neighbouring marshes, and hedgehogs from the adjacent fields, make their homes in the sculptured capitals of her fallen columns." 2. *A home of unclean birds.* Birds perch and sing on the lintels of broken windows, joyous in existence amid extensive ruins. The music of the palace, men-singers and women-singers, have ceased to be; but the song of the bird startles the spectator in the lonely scene. 3. *A heap of desolation.* "Desolation shall be in the thresholds." On spots where porters watched and multitudes thronged, heaps of rubbish stand. The thresholds of house and temple, mart and palace, are covered with dust. "The sands carried by winds from the desert, have buried the wreck of former grandeur, and hid every trace of its magnificence." **III. Its ruins would become a derision to travellers.** "Every one that passeth by her shall hiss and wag his hand." He shall hiss with scorn, and motion with the hand in detestation, not in joy (Nah. iii. 19). The desolation would astonish, and the ruin of the immense and stately city would be a source of joy. "The merchants among the people shall hiss at thee; thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt be any more."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 13. *Desolation.* No desolation is like that of decayed luxury. It preaches the nothingness of man, the fruitlessness of his toils, the fleetingness of his hopes and enjoyments. Grass in a court or on a beaten road, much more in a town, speaks of the passing away of what has been; that man, wont to be there, is not there now. It leaves the feeling of void and forsakenness [*Pusey*].

Ver. 15. "*I am*," &c. Pride will fall. The more selfish and secure in sin, the greater the human shame and the Divine indignation. This was the language of—1. *Pride.* Deification of its own might. 2. *Selfishness.* I alone, and no other that I care for. 3. *Defiance.* I am, who dare touch me? No security in worldly strength and prosperity. 4. *Self-deception.* Judgments from God humble the most haughty, and turn the most mirthful into mourning. Thus Divine retribution

"Falls most sure
On wicked men, when they are most secure."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1—3. *Meekness.* Is it not as the steps of degree in the Temple, whereby we descend to the knowledge of ourselves, and ascend to the knowledge of God? Would we attain mercy? humility will help [*C. Sutton*].

Vers. 10, 11. *Pride.* That which first overcame man, is the last thing he overcomes [*Augustine*].

Vers. 13—15. This doom on Nineveh was carried out to the very letter. It was not simply the largest city of the ancient world. In the mouth of the Hebrew prophets it was the name of a district, 25 miles long, by 15 broad, which included four large cities, besides villages and forts, within its protecting walls. About six centuries B.C., this vast populous district was conquered and destroyed by the Medes (under Cyaxares), and the Chaldeans (under Nabopolassar, father of Nebuchadnezzar). So complete was the destruction, that with startling abruptness the great city vanished from the face of the earth, and its very ruins were hidden from the eyes of men. In A.D. 1766, Niebuhr, the great historian, stood on the eastern bank, which he took to be acclivities wrought by the hand of nature. It was not till A.D. 1842 that Layard, Rawlinson, and Botta dug into these mounds, exhumed and interpreted the remains which tell the story of the city's greatness, luxury, and culture with a power beyond that of words [*S. Cox*].

"*I am.*" Indulged sin thrives and strengthens in character. Germs of evil gather round the accursed root, until judgments from heaven cut it down.

"When we in our viciousness
Grow hard, the wise gods seal our eyes,
In our own slime drop our clear judgments,
Make us adore our errors, and thus
We strut to our destruction."

CHAPTER III.

Critical Notes.] **Woe**] to Jerusalem; others, Nineveh. **Filthy**] From a word, to straighten oneself; hence, to rebel, to be refractory. **2. Voice**] In law and prophets. **Correction**] Instruction with manifold chastisements. **3. Princes**] aggravated the evil (cf. Mic. iii.). **Lions**] tearing the poor (Prov. xxviii. 15: Ezek. xix. 2: Nah. ii. 12). **Wolves**] (cf. Hab. i. 8): voracious and insatiable, who devour all in the night. **4. Prophets**] Light and vainglorious; from a word, to boil over; frivolous in words; brag (Jer. xxiii. 32). **Priests**] desecrate the temple and distort the law; make everything common (Ezek. xxii. 26). **5.**] The cause not with God. He is very near, declares his displeasure with sin, and daily brings all things to light. **Morning**] Lit. in the morning, in the morning. **Shame**] of penitence and conversion. **6. Cut off**] Judgments appealed to as warnings (ch. ii.); to consider severity and goodness. **7.**] Threatened danger would be averted if the people would turn from evil. **But**] Instead of repenting, they **rose early**, became more zealous in wickedness, prepared themselves for it, like parties starting early for a journey. Hence punishment. **8. Wait**] The prophecy returns to its starting-point in vers. 2 and 3, to bring it to a close [*Keil*]. **Prey**] (cf. Gen. xlix. 27: Isa. xxxiii. 23). **Determination**] is fixed, or my right or justice to do this (ver. 5). "My justice, *i. e.* the justice which I shall bring to the light, consists in the fact that I pour my fury upon all nations, to exterminate the wicked by judgments, and to convert the penitent to myself, and prepare myself worshippers out of all nations" [*Keil*]. **Gather**] To sift and convert them by judgments. **9. For**] The reason for judgment, *lip* purity of language, "effusions of devotion," springing from renewed hearts. **Consent**] Shoulder; a metaphor from burden-bearers with even shoulders (Jer. xxxii. 39); one accord, *i. e.* unanimity. **10. From**] most distant countries Jews will be presented to God by converted Gentiles as a meat-offering (cf. Isa. lxvi. 20). Rejected Israelites will be benefited by Gentiles entering into the kingdom of God. **11. Ashamed**] All cause for shame removed. They will be sanctified and restored to favour. **Pride**] Haughty princes and priests, who exult in sin, taken away. **Mountain**] The city or temple of which they boasted. **12.**] Those spared in judgment and gathered together. **Afflicted**] Bowed down, oppressed with feeling of impotence for good, opposite of pride, and trusting in self—"a humble and lowly people" [*Newc.*]. **13. This remnant**] will be a holy nation (Ex. xix. 6); without injustice in life and deceit in word. **Feed**] in peace, undisturbed by foreign foes or unjust rulers. "This blessing is still further developed in what follows; first of all, by reference to the removal of the judgments of God (vers. 14—17), and secondly, by the promise of God that all the obstacles which prevent the enjoyment of the blessing are to be cleared away" [*Keil*]. **14.**] Fulness of joy indicated by repetition of words **15.**] The reasons given for exultation. Evil removed, enemies destroyed, full enjoyment of God's presence. **16.**] Therefore no cause for fear, but reason for diligence. **Slack**] Faint not (Heb. xii. 12) through alarm and anxiety (Isa. xiii. 7). **17.**] Jehovah within is **mighty** to help and save, and rejoices over his rescued people (Isa. lxii. 5; lxv. 19). **Rest**] Be silent in his love; love deeply felt and absorbed in its objects. "As a man caresses his dearest wife, so will God then quietly repose in thy love" [*Calvin*]. *To be silent*, not to speak, is here very appropriately employed to express the non-remembrance of iniquity [*Hend.*]. **18.**] Those who pined in distance at the time of festivities, shall be gathered together. **Of thee**] The people are of thy origin and descent (Isa. lviii. 12: Ezra ii. 59: Ps. lxviii. 27). **Reproach**] Presses upon them as a burden [cf. *Lange*]. **19. Undo**] Lit. I will deal with all oppressors; heal the limping. **Her that halteth**] Weakness no barrier to restoration; gather together the dispersed, and will get] Lit. make them a praise and fame in lands where they have been reproached. **20. Captivity**] Lit. captivities of every age and kind shall end. God will lead them, finish the work begun, and, incredible as it may appear, their glorification shall be seen with their own eyes (Luke xxiv. 41).

HOMILETICS.

The Guilty City.—*Verses* 1—4.

After threatenings denounced against other nations, God speaks to the Church, denounces Jerusalem for the iniquities done by her. Former means were used in vain. Now the last sentence is uttered. A sinful state will bring a woeful doom.

I. Its inhabitants were ungodly. Its citizens were chosen of God to be "a holy people, zealous of good works;" but they were stained with corruption and vice. 1. *They were deaf to warning.* "She obeyed not the voice" of God in his law and prophets. Remonstrance and appeal were in vain; wise counsel and wholesome reproof were set at nought. "They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." 2. *They refused correction.* "She received not correction." She was neither disciplined by her own, nor the sufferings of others. Humbled by force and not in spirit, men kick and rebel; like an untractable child under the rod, they increase their own chastisement. "Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way." 3. *They hardened themselves in wickedness.* Obstinate in sin, they were given up to filthiness and infamy. (1) *They were rebellious.* "Woe to her that is refractory (filthy)." (2) *They were defiled.* "Polluted" within, notwithstanding ceremonial purity without. (3) *They were oppressive.* "The oppressing city." Rebellion begets inward defilement before God, and cruelty to man. Hence—(4) *They provoked God to anger.* "Woe to her!" The infinite patience of God may be exhausted, and he may become weary in correcting for sin. "Why should ye be stricken any more?" (Isa. i. 5).

II. Its rulers were unjust. The leaders, civil and religious, who should have been a protection and a praise, were cruel and ferocious. 1. *The princes were cruel.* "Her princes within her are roaring lions." Terrifying inferiors and devouring the poor who had no helper. 2. *The judges were corrupt.* "Her judges are evening wolves." Instead of defending the innocent and redressing the wrong, they were most greedy and rapacious. They were no check to the insolence and rapacity of the nobles; but like wild beasts driven by famine, they left not a bone of their evening prey for the hunger of the morning. "They gnaw not the bones till the morrow." 3. *The prophets were unfaithful.* "Her prophets were light and treacherous persons." (1) In their *words* they were light and frivolous, without truth and stability in their teaching. Insolent speech and empty boasting characterized their ministry. (2) In their life they were treacherous and inconsistent. They evinced not that gravity and humility which become the messengers of God; trifled with most serious subjects; declared their own thoughts to be the truth of God, and apostatized from him to whom they should have witnessed. 3. *The priests were polluted* "Her priests have polluted the sanctuary." (1) They *committed sacrilege;* polluted the temple and its services. They encouraged others, in a bold and carnal spirit, to profane that which was holy, and turn to their own use that which should be consecrated to God. (2) They *violated law.* "They have done violence to the law." They openly strained or secretly wrested it in forms of violence. By craft and gloss they perverted its function, and became a type of all who transgress the commandment of God and make it of none effect by their traditions (Matt. xv. 6; xxiii. 23). Thus were all classes of society, high and low, accused of guilt and exposed to judgment. Mere power and outward sanctity will never save a people. They must be under the fear of God, accept his correction, or they will be denounced with woe

KEEPING FROM GOD.—*Verse* 3.

God is the source of our happiness, the satisfaction of our hearts, and the end of our being. What, then, the condition of those who draw not near to God? These words may be said concerning—

I. **The wicked generally.** Sin separates from God, creates enmity against him. The wicked, through the pride of their countenance, will not seek God. God is not in their thoughts nor supreme in their life. They stand at a distance, will not approach God; but say, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. II. **Some afflicted people.** Jerusalem was heavily afflicted, but stubborn. The end of affliction is not answered in the case of many. Like Asa, they ask counsel of physicians and not God. They murmur, repine, and rebel against him. They draw not near to God in his providential dealings with them. "It lightens the stroke," said one, "to draw near to him who handles the rod." "I would run into the arms of Christ, if he stood with a drawn sword in his hand," said Luther. "It is good for me to draw near to God." III. **Some professing Christians.** Instead of walking with God, they live afar off. The sanctuary and the prayer-meeting are forsaken, the Bible neglected, and the back is turned from God. In a letter to Matthew Henry, his mother says, "I write a line or two to remind you *to keep in with God* by solemn, secret daily prayer."

"The soul in audience with its God is heaven."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1, 2. Corruption. 1. *Its nature.* "Towards God, in herself, towards man, she is wholly turned to evil, not in passing acts but in her abiding state. She is known only by what she has become, and what has been done for her in vain. She is *rebellious*, and so had had the law; *defiled*, and so had been cleansed; and therefore her state is the more hopeless" [*Pusey*]. 2. *Its source.* Contempt of the word. Law and punishment, invitation and promise, failed. "She obeyed not the voice." 3. *Its manifestation.* Unbelief in threatenings and promises leads to settled hatred. "If a man despise the word of God, then the next thing is that he refuses all amendment, because he is well pleased with himself, and imagines everything which is in him good. And this is the climax of perversion of the life from God" [*Lange*]. 4. *Its consequence.* "She drew not near to her God." No change effected in life and heart. Distance from God not merely as a natural fact, but as a penal consequence. Drew not nigh in repentance, faith, and love; stood away until too late to come. "The way of destruction begins with obstinacy against God," says one; "then comes pollution by vice; finally, the destruction of conscience, which becomes manifest in open acts of violence and crime." *The fourfold sin.* Disobedience, obstinacy, atheism, and final impenitence. Take heed lest any of you "be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

Ver. 4. Pollution. 1. in the persons; 2. in the things. The priests were polluted themselves, and "made the sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred." "*Polluted her sanctuary*, lit. *holiness*, and so holy rites, persons (Ezra viii. 28), things, places (as the sanctuary), sacrifices. All these they polluted, being themselves polluted—first themselves, then the holy things which they handled, handling them as they ought not; carelessly and irreverently, not as ordained by God; turning them to their own use and self-indulgence" [*Pusey*]. "Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean" (Ezek. xxii. 26: Mal. ii. 8).

HOMILETICS.

God's Justice proved to a Guilty People.—*Verses* 5, 6.

No argument against the righteousness of God can be presented by those who have been warned, spared, and at last condemned. If iniquity be determined, and the sinner becomes incorrigible, the course of justice is clear. God could not rightly be taxed with injustice in punishing Jerusalem with greater suffering than the offence deserved. This is proved—

I. **By God's holy character.** "The just Lord is in the midst thereof." He is essentially holy, eternally just; the primal law of right to all. He is—1. *Just in himself;* and 2. *Just to others.* "He will not do iniquity." He is in the midst of men who are polluted and oppressive; reproving wrong, and giving an example of right. Hence, if sinners heed not, God cannot connive at their wickedness, and become as one of themselves (Ps. l. 21). "The Lord is upright, and there is no unrighteousness in him." II. **By God's righteous administration.** God not only dwelt in the temple, but gave clear intimations of duty, bright manifestations of equity, which they heeded not. God's condemnations of evil practices were—1. *Open.* In the day, not in secret. 2. *Clear.* He brought "his judgment to *light*." All secret things, all works of darkness, were exposed and reproved (2 Sam. xii. 12). 3. *Continual.* "Every morning;" morning by morning, day by day, his voice was heard and his judgments conspicuous. "He faileth not" in judgment and mercy; but they knew no shame, were conscious of no sin. "They were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush." III. **By God's terrible judgments upon others.** "I have cut off the nations," &c. (ver. 6). Judgments upon others had always been set before them as a warning. When about to enter the inheritance (Lev. xviii. 24—26; xx. 23), they were cautioned. When they got possession the ruins of cities were silent preachers of the results of sin (Isa. xvii. 9). They had been the instruments of inflicting judgments, and lived in the memories of God's visitations upon others. Fortified cities had been destroyed, mighty towers levelled to the dust, and nations completely ruined, to admonish them, but all in vain. How earnest is God in seeking the sinner, but how terrible the punishment at last! "I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them."

Aggravations of Human Guilt.—*Verses* 5—7.

What aggravated their guilt till it became intolerable, and put them beyond all mercy save the "mercy of judgment," was—1. *That God had given them a pure law of life, and himself administered it among them.* In other cities, such as Gaza or Nineveh, the presence and the law of God were but obscurely revealed. Men were left to grope after the Unknown, if haply they might find him; to infer a spiritual presence from the operation of physical laws; to deduce a Divine rule from the imperfect and confused utterances of reason and conscience. In Jerusalem, God and his will were "set in the light;" the history of the chosen race, the services of the temple, the voices and scriptures of the prophets, the national habits of thought, and manner of life, loudly proclaimed God to be their God. Who should know him if they did not? and who do his will if they disobeyed it? But with so pure light of goodness in their midst, they wrapped themselves in darkness, and hated the light which reproved their deeds. "But the unjust know no shame." 2. *That in the destruction inflicted upon neighbouring kingdoms, he had constantly warned them of the inevitable results of violating that law* (ver. 6). They had seen race after race cut off, their battlements laid waste, their cities battered down, and their streets reduced to such ruinous desolation that no man dwelt in them, nor so much as passed through them. What were these judgments but the law of God

'writ large," and illustrated so impressively as to arrest the attention of the most heedless, and to rouse a saving fear in the stubborn and impenitent? But even these glaring and portentous illustrations of God's wrath against sin and all who cleave to it, had been wasted. They were unmoved, or moved only for a moment, under shocks and alarms. Only a judgment more severe than any they had seen or known could constrain them to penitence, through penitence to righteousness, and through righteousness to peace. "The nation that did not turn pale" (ch. ii. 1). 3. *That much as they suffered, they had not accepted correction, nor learned that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord* (ver. 7). Not only had they seen "a day of the Lord" darken other lands, and judgments desolate heathen cities. They themselves had been visited with judgment, smitten again and again till the whole head was sick, and the whole heart faint. The whole body politic was bruised, and wounded, and sore. Their whole past history was full of Divine chastenings. What was their meaning? what were they sent to say? "*Only fear God, accept correction*," let it produce its natural effect upon you, and all will be right. Corrections were sent to them that their land and city might be spared. But if they be rejected, they harden and deprave. Jerusalem had been content to give the day to disobedience and mutiny. Now as if it were not long enough for the sins they were eager to commit, "*they rose up early*" in the morning "*to corrupt all their doings*," so shameless were they, so incorrigible [*Preacher's Lantern. Vol. II. Adapted*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 5. *In the midst.* God's presence with an apostate people will not save from wrath, but will bring it nearer to them. "Is not the Lord among us?" was their boast (Mic. iii. 11). True, he is, but it is for another end from what ye think [*Calvin*].

He faileth not. 1. In presence; 2. In promise; 3. In help. He continually sets before us examples of judgment and mercy. "He wakeneth morning by morning" (Isa. v. 4; l. 4). He does not fail to visit at the time looked for, though he may seem to forbear or linger behind (Hab. ii. 3).

Shame. 1. Many in the Church and in the nation acknowledge God, yet sin against the clear light of the Word. 2. When such are mad in their sin and rush to ruin, it is a presage of their destruction when the Word has no influence upon them; a token that judgment must come, notwithstanding warnings, when "the unjust knoweth no shame" [*Hutcheson*].

Vers. 6, 7. 1. The chastisement of others is designed to improve us. The *design* is benevolent; "so their dwelling should not be cut off." The *method* is suitable; "howsoever I punished them." The *results* are reasonable; "surely thou wilt fear." 2. If the warning is unheeded we shall ourselves be punished. "No words could be more *simple* and *direct* than these; none could state more plainly the merciful and Divine purpose of judgment; the true function of the miseries men are called to endure. These judgments and miseries come to teach us the fear of the Lord; that is, to save us from all fear. So soon as we accept them as corrections of our sins, their end is answered; henceforth there is no anger in them, no injurious pain, but only a Divine love and goodwill. And if no statement of the meaning and function of suffering can be more plain than this, surely none can be more *consolatory*. For, according to Zephaniah, it comes only for our good, for our highest good; to teach us the true wisdom, and to make us perfect. When once we 'accept' it, its end being reached, there is no reason why it should not either pass away or be changed into the stay and stimulus of our life."

> Long unaffected, undismayed,
> In pleasure's path secure I stray'd
> Thou mad'st me feel thy chast'ning rod,
> And straight I turn'd unto my God.

Instruction. — Other men's woes should be our warnings; others' sufferings our sermons; others' lashes our lessons; God's house of correction. a

school of instruction where we should hear and fear, and do no more so (Deut. xvii. 13). He that trembleth not in hearing, shall be crushed to pieces in feeling, said that martyr [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

THE WAITING ATTITUDE OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN TIMES OF TROUBLE.—*Verse* 8.

The prophecy now returns to its starting-point. The faithful are called upon to wait upon God, as formerly they were exhorted to repentance (ch. ii. 3). Judgments had thundered forth in terror, the impenitent were to be swept away, and the fire of Divine wrath to consume the whole earth. But after the storm comes a calm. Consolation is given in calamity. The judgments upon the enemies will issue in the salvation of the sons of Israel, the purification of the earth, and the glory of the Lord. Good, not evil, will spring out of present trials. "*Therefore wait*" a little longer, the day will surely come. God's people must hope in him.

I. **The basis of hope.** "Wait ye upon me, saith the Lord." Salvation could not come from the people, even of favoured Israel, who had corrupted themselves. Princes plundered, and judges bribed, to get wealth; prophets deceived, and priests consecrated themselves to idols. There was no hope in the government nor in the priesthood. All were silent and all were guilty. Law makes nothing perfect, Christ alone brings in a better hope. II. **The discouragements of hope.** Sad must have been the heart of God's people under their oppression. Many things would tend to weaken their faith in God. 1. *Inward decay.* Leaders became unfaithful. When those upon whom we depend for help, and who should be examples of virtue, become faithless, we doubt all men and call them liars (Ps. cxvi. 11). 2. *Foreign invasion.* The enemies came, like wave after wave, and swept the land. The innocent suffered with the guilty, and none escaped. 3. *Long delay of help.* How can God be *holy*, when vice unfolds itself and pollutes the whole nation? How can God be *kind*, when the righteous are overwhelmed with the wicked? Where is God's *providence* in punishing the evil and rewarding the good? Disappointment and dejection seize the mind, and we forget to wait upon God. It is not the intenseness, but the length of trials, which test our patience. "The patience of hope," says one, "will end" in the full assurance of hope—

> "Our lives, discolour'd with our present woes,
> May still grow white, and smile with happier hours" [*Addison*].

III. **The rewards of hope.** Wait for me, the day is at hand; I will seize my prey, and accomplish my purpose (vers. 9—20). 1. *The enemy would be subdued.* Gathered together for cruel ends, God would snatch the prey out of their mouth, and crush their opposition. 2. *They would be sheltered in the day of wrath.* God not only overthrows hostility to his people in its powerful juncture of circumstances, but makes a complete destruction of heathenism and a full salvation to his chosen. 3. *A purified earth would be created.* The earth would be consumed with the fire of insulted love, and out of it would spring a new order of things. Christendom will yet become pure in life, united in effort, and all "with one mind and one mouth shall glorify God" (Rom. xv. 6).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 8. *Prey.* Divine justice, like eagles, ready to fall upon the prey, the carcase of corruption (Matt. xxiv. 28). Taking prey as booty, we have the picture of the warrior leading to victory. Hence—1. Danger from sin and enemies. 2. Divine power in deliverance. "Through the judgment Jehovah

obtains from among the nations those who will confess his name, so that the souls from among the nations which desire salvation fall to Him as prey (cf. Isa. liii. 12, with lii. 15, and xlix. 7)" [*Keil*].

Fierce anger, or God's judgments, a fire. 1. To consume; or—2. To cleanse. The wicked are exterminated, the penitent are converted, and worshippers are prepared out of all nations. "In the *first* place, there is a work of *judgment*, as purifying, struggling, and demolishing to the last. In the *second* place, there is a work *of salvation*, a new-creating work, so that the same history is presented as a progressive communication of the Divine life-germ, advancing to the complete re-creation of that which has become corrupt by sin. These views cannot be separated; each receives its internal form by the irradiating lines of the other" [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

THE GATHERING OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.—*Verses* 9, 10.

In judgment God dispersed his ancient people, but they shall be restored with the Gentiles to God again. The heathens shall be converted, and be the means of turning the scattered nation to Jehovah. God will gather from all parts a people pure in life and united in service.

I. **The Gentiles shall be gathered together.** "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia;" Abyssinia and neighbouring nations shall be converted. From the utmost bound of the known world shall people come. The dispersed, the outcasts of spiritual Israel, shall be gathered from every region. With the restoration of the Jews shall "the fulness of the Gentiles" come. "That also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." II. **The Gentiles shall be holy in their life.** 1. *Pure in their language.* "Then will I turn to the people a pure language." The confusion of tongues was the punishment of sin; but *lips* once polluted with idolatry and blasphemy, shall be purified by the Spirit of God. A pure language indicates a pure life. The mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart. The lip was created by God, and should be used for his service and glory. A pure heart refines character and conversation, pours grace into the lips, and cleanses them from falsehood and profanity. "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend." 2. *Sincere in their worship.* "My suppliants shall bring mine offering." Converted Gentiles will not only bring devout Jews as an offering to God (cf. Isa. lxvi. 20); but they will present themselves in humility and acceptance (Rom. xv. 16). No longer defiled by invocations and foul strains to idols, they will "all call upon the name of the Lord." "For, from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering." 3. *United in their service.* "Serve him with one consent." Saved by judgments, the nations shall be sanctified in speech, and one in effort. They shall bear the burden without strain or distress, walk step by step and work shoulder to shoulder in the cause of God. Christendom shall yet be purged from bigotry and sectarianism. There shall be a return to the simplicity and union in Christ. The Gospel shall dislodge idolatry and anti-Christian systems. Nations shall walk together—the Jew and the Greek, the Barbarian and the Scythian—side by side, shoulder to shoulder, bearing the conquests of the cross. Thus, on earth we may anticipate the joys, and hear the songs, of heaven (Rev. vii. 10 and 12; xi. 15). "I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them and of their children after them."

Bearing the Burden with one consent.—*Verse* 9.

The law of God is a burden. Man can only bear it without strain and distress as each freely assumes it, and as all help to bear it, by walking in willing and happy consent of obedience. To induce a free and universal obedience, men are judged and corrected of the Lord. The metaphor, therefore, suggests three main thoughts—

1. *That the law of God is a burden which men are reluctant to assume.* To our selfwill it is always hard to submit to the purest and tenderest will, even to the Divine Will, which moves in the light of eternal wisdom, and at the impulse of perfect love. Christ admits obedience to be *a yoke* to our unruly passions, *a burden* to our stubborn necks (Matt. xi. 28—30). When we delight in his law after the inward man, we find another law in our members warring against the law of our mind, and bringing us into the captivity of sin (Rom. vii. 21—23). We can only enter into rest as we get unity and freedom in our life, and we willingly submit to a higher will than our own. 2. *That we can only attain this freedom as, with cheerful and enforced accord, we assume the burden of the Divine law, and do the will of God.* Self-will makes us hateful to ourselves and to others; incapacitates for social and spiritual life. Follow your own will, you become a burden to yourself and all about you. Voluntarily curtail your own liberty, then you have true liberty. Set yourself against the world, you will find that the world has a stronger will than you have. We *must* take up some burden, and submit to some law. No law is so good, no burden so light, as the good will of God. This will rules in human affairs. It is wise to make it our law—not merely yield to it, but cheerfully adopt and love it, and walk in liberty. Love makes all burdens light. When we love God, his will grows beautiful to us, and preferable to our own. *Because* we bear the yoke we find rest; *because* we keep the commandment we walk at large (Ps. cxix. 45). We are free because we obey. But are we happy because we are free. 3. *That the happiness of obedience depends on the unanimity and the universality of obedience.* Only when *all* men serve God with one shoulder the sense of strain and distress will pass from us. To love God is to love man. Till *they* share our freedom, it cannot be a happy freedom. Till they love him and do his will, they will put many hindrances and temptations in our way which make obedience hard and painful. If they do not take their full share in bearing the burden, it will press unduly upon our shoulders. If some are morally taller and others morally shorter, men do not keep step. Only when the whole world stands under the Divine burden with one shoulder, and moves with one step, will our freedom be a happy freedom, and God's statutes become our songs. Seeing how men suffer from the sins of men, and nations from the sins of nations, we may well long and pray for the time when all men shall speak with a pure lip and serve with a single shoulder [*Preacher's Lantern*, vol. II.].

The Restored Remnant.—*Verses* 11—13.

In these verses the prophet pictures the happy characteristics and condition of restored Israel. These qualities are common to God's people in all ages and countries. Notice—

I. Their spiritual character. 1. *They are few in number.* "The remnant of Israel." Small compared with the whole, yet precious in the sight of God—increasing, and will increase. 2. *They are humble in spirit.* "An afflicted and poor people." Poor in spirit, and conscious of no desert. Realizing life, growth, and strength only from God. 3. *They are dependent upon God.* Feeling themselves unworthy, they naturally "trust in the name of the Lord." 4. *They are upright in conduct.* (1) They *do no iniquity.* (2) They *speak no lies.* They worship God in truth, and love man in sincerity. They are Israelites indeed, in whom

is no guile. Born of God, they sin not (1 John iii. 9) in word or deed. Where true faith exists, holy life will follow. II. Their blessed condition. They are completely restored to holiness, sit in the centre of a regenerated world, in the special presence and under the constant care of Jehovah. 1. *They are cleansed from shame for sin.* "In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for thy doings." The disgrace of rebellion shall be wiped away. Remembrance of sin and failure may cause penitence—long after sin is renounced and forgiven we feel humble—but the guilt and reproach of sin shall not remain. 2. *They are delivered from spiritual pride.* The spirit of the Pharisee, the vain confidence which they had in the temple, and the pride of descent from Abraham, shall be taken away. 3. *They are redeemed from proud oppressors.* "I will take away out of the midst of thee, them that rejoice in thy pride." The meek and lowly will be left. The haughty judge and the proud sinners will be exterminated. Priests or prophets who exult in sinful ways will be cut off. 4. *They are specially protected by God.* (*a*) *Delivered from fear.* "None shall make them afraid." No foreign foe nor native prince—no "treacherous" prophet, nor "violent" and "polluting" priest, can touch them (ver. 4). They are beyond all harm and fear. (*b*) *Blessed with peace.* As God's sheep they "shall feed" in green pastures—"lie down" to rest in perpetual enjoyment (Mic. vii. 14), and dwell in God's presence without fear (Lev. xxvi. 6). "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God."

The True Israelite.—*Verse* 13.

Of the subjects of Divine grace here mentioned, notice: *Their number;* "a remnant." Strait is the gate, and narrow the way, that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it. Yet God has always had a people for his Name—never left himself without a witness, and this has been our case as a nation; for, "except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom," &c. Though "a little flock" in a large field, "a garden" in a vast wilderness, yet "he shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." *Their sanctity.* "They shall not do iniquity." Take this with some restriction. "There is not on earth a just man that doeth good and sinneth not." But they are not "workers of iniquity," and "evil-doers." Sin does not reign in them. They hate every false way, and esteem all his commandments concerning all things to be right. He that has "true holiness" cannot be satisfied without perfect holiness. He therefore prays to be sanctified in body, soul, and spirit. *Their sincerity.* "They shall not speak lies," &c. A part is put for the whole, and the quality of speech expresses the inward temper of their minds. Everything is a lie religiously that does not accord with the state of the heart. Only an upright spirit can maintain a deceitless tongue before God. Christians are not mere pretenders; a painted sepulchre, fair without, and rottenness within. Not mere actors on a stage, but are really what they appear to be. Their integrity is specially known by their fear of self-deception. They come to the light, examine themselves by the Word, and implore the inspection of God himself: "Search me, O God." *Their privileges.* Their blessedness is expressed pastorally, and includes three things. First, *pasture:* they shall "feed." As new creatures their food is intellectual and spiritual; found in the ordinances of religion, and with the Saviour himself. Secondly, *repose:* and shall "lie down." In an eastern climate, in a warm sun, how desirable would rest be! Hence the Church says, Tell me, not only where thou feedest, but "where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon." Thirdly, *security:* "and none shall make them afraid." Sheep are the most timid of all animals, every appearance and movement alarms them. But the righteous should be bold as a lion; their duty

requires it, and their principles justify it. God has amply provided for their confidence. When they believe it, they can be in quiet from the fear of evil. "dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods" [*W. Jay*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 11. *Haughty because of holy mountain.* Pride in outward privileges. 1. A sin against God who gave them. 2. A danger, because robbing of enjoyment, and exposing to judgment. "That haughtiness is most offensive to God, which is supported and fed by the pretensions of holiness." If pride be "the last infirmity of noble minds," "is not spiritual pride the last infirmity of religious minds? When the Jew shall no longer boast himself in Jerusalem and the temple; when there shall not be a single sectarian left to pride himself in his exclusive possession of some spiritual gift, or on his singular fidelity to some neglected truth; when every man shall hold all he has in trust for his brethren, call nothing his own, and value all gifts in proportion as they are common to all; when this catholic charity is the animating, all-pervading spirit of the Church of God, will the millennium be far off? or Heaven itself?" [*S. Cox*].

Ver. 12. It is painful to the human heart, that it must first become completely poor and humble before it learns to trust entirely in the living God. This is the reason that the hearts rich in the opinion of the world are richest in dead idols [*Lange*].

Vers. 12, 13. *The glory of the Christian Church.* Not in outward splendour; for they are often few, poor, and afflicted, but in holy life, exalted worship, and Divine protection. *Feed:* Shall have all that heart can wish or need require: plenty, safety, security [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

The Joy of the Redeemed.—*Verses* 14—17.

These words are a call to the converted Israelites, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to exult in their distinguished blessings. The prophet seems to be in a transport of joy himself, as he adds word to word, and epithet to epithet, in tender feelings. Three designations are given: "Daughter of Zion," "Israel," and "daughter of Jerusalem." The wonders of "that day" are great, and the source of exultant joy to all who see them. The causes of this joy are distinctly pointed out.

I. **Judgments are removed.** "The Lord hath taken away thy judgments." Israel was chastised in mercy, but God forgave her sins, and took away her judgments. Christians are freed from condemnation by the law, and rejoice in hope of salvation. When sin is pardoned, the consequences of sin are removed. When the cause is destroyed the effects will cease; happiness follows the way of holiness. II. **Enemies are subdued.** "He hath cast out (lit. cleared quite away) thine enemy." This is a type of the destruction of antichrist, the casting out of the prince of this world (Matt. xii. 31), and the overthrow of all opposition. Delivered from all enemies, God's people will serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all their days (Luke i. 74, 75). III. **God is enthroned in their midst.** "Even the Lord is in the midst of thee." God seemed to desert them for a time, but now returns to a purified temple. As King of Israel he sits enthroned in mercy to receive the homage of a grateful nation. He dwells in the Church, and will be with his people to the end of time. 1. *To deliver them from evil.* "Thou shalt not see evil any more." 2. *To strengthen their hearts.* They will neither be weary nor faint in God's service. Saving health will be imparted, timidity shall be overcome, and men will admire their courage. 3. *To rejoice over them with sacred joy*

"He will rejoice over thee with joy." With a bridegroom's joy will God "rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in his people" (Isa. lxv. 19; lxii. 5). But man's love is only a faint shadow of God's love. Love in twofold aspects—in its silence and exultation—represents God's satisfaction and joy in his people. He exults over and takes pleasure in those that fear him. Rejoicing now is only the first-fruits. Those who weep by the rivers of Babylon will sing in the new Jerusalem: "*Sing*, (O daughter of Zion), *shout*, (O Israel), be *glad*, and *rejoice* with all thy heart, O daughter of Jerusalem."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 14. Whether the Church or the faithful soul—she is summoned by all her names—called to the fullest joy in God, with every expression, and every feeling. *Sing;* it is the inarticulate, thrilling, trembling burst of joy: *shout;* again the inarticulate, yet louder, swell of joy; a trumpet-blast: and then, too, deep within; *be glad*, the calm inward joy of the soul; *exult*, the triumph of the soul which cannot contain itself for joy; and this, *with the whole heart*, no corner of it not pervaded with joy. The ground of this is the complete removal of every evil, and the full presence of God [*Pusey*].

Vers. 15—17. Very remarkable is the use of the sacred number three in these verses. Threefold is the description of their being freed from sins: (1) They *shall not do iniquity;* (2) nor *speak lies;* (3) neither *shall a deceitful tongue be in their mouth.* Threefold their blessedness: They shall (1) *feed;* (2) *lie down;* (3) *none make them afraid.* Threefold the exhortation to joy: *sing*, to God the Father; *shout*, to God the Son; *be glad and rejoice*, in God the Holy Ghost. The promise is threefold: (1) *Thou shalt not see evil any more;* (2) *fear thou not;* (3) *let not thine hands be slack.* The love of God is threefold: (1) He *will rejoice over thee* with joy; (2) He *will rest in his love;* (3) He *will joy over thee with singing* [*Pusey*].

Ver. 17. *God in the midst.* 1. *God near.* In his works, but specially present with his saints. 2. *God mighty.* Mighty to comfort, sustain, and defend. 3. *God will save.* He is willing, bound by promise, oath, and blood. 4. But *is* he *thy God?* Thine by promise, covenant, and actual possession.

> "How happy, then, are they to whom
> The Lord our God is known;
> Whom he, from all the world besides,
> Has chosen for his own!"

He will rejoice over thee. The satisfaction here implied is the Saviour's own joy arising out of the salvation of his people. First, we may view this joy as the *result of success.* Secondly, as *a manifestation of benevolence.* Thirdly, as *indicative of the delight and complacency* with which he regards his people. The Saviour's joy over, and in, his people is *the sinner's hope.* Lastly, the Saviour's joy is the *saint's example.* He was infinitely *more* than an example, and *nothing less.* If we depend upon him, we must resemble him [*Jay*].

HOMILETICS.

Mourning for the Solemn Assembly.—*Ver.* 18.

The prophet concludes with the promise that all the dispersed—all who mourn because they do not share the joy of festal meetings in the temple—shall be restored to ancient privileges, and gathered into one fold. We have not to sorrow because deprived of Christian ordinances. Our temples stand, our Sabbaths are not taken away, yet there is reason to mourn for the condition of Zion.

I. Mourn when deprived of personal attendance. Domestic affliction, accidents, and trials may detain from its solemnities. Then the soul is cast down within us. God thus teaches us to value the means more highly, quickens our

relish for the provisions of his house, and draws us nearer to himself. "When shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps. xlii. 2). **II. Mourn when neglected by others.** Many entirely forsake the assembling of themselves together (Heb. x. 25). They do not see the utility and necessity of public worship. Others are kept away by most trifling excuses. In vain are all pretences to religion if the means of grace have no attraction. Resolve with Nehemiah and his friends, "We will not forsake the house of our God." **III. Mourn when dishonoured by its attendants.** It is dishonoured by *a worldly spirit.* Many have no serious heart in worship. "If familiarity does not breed contempt," says one, "it must always tend to reduce veneration." "In thy fear will I worship towards thy holy temple." 2. It is dishonoured *by inconsistent conduct.* The apostasies, backslidings, and disgraceful conduct of professors bring reproach upon the house and the people of God. The enemies blaspheme, the way of truth is evil spoken of, and the Redeemer is wounded in the house of his friends. God's people bear the reproach, and grieve at the dishonour cast upon solemn assemblies. To them, this "is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation." **IV. Mourn for its lack of spiritual prosperity.** Its members lack fervour and power. They are faithless, unhappily divided, and do not heartily work together. Its agencies are few, and fail in their design. Sinners are not converted to God, and the world is prejudiced against Christianity. When the ways of Zion mourn, the sons of Zion are sorrowful also. God will not forget their distress, but gather them (1) to feasts on earth, and (2) to the assembly in heaven. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee."

THE WONDERFUL RESTORATION.—*Verses* 19, 20.

God confirms his promise of restoration by removing all impediments. The prophecy closes with the final reversal of all which in this imperfect state of things seems turned upside down, when those who now mourn shall be comforted, they who now bear reproach and shame shall have glory, and those who now afflict the people of God shall be undone [*Pusey*].

I. A restoration glorious in its character. It will be a most signal day for Israel. What they could not do for themselves God will do for them. 1. *It will be Divinely performed.* "At that time will I bring—I gather you—I turn back" &c. God manifests his interest in his people, and the greatest difficulties should not lead us to doubt the certainty of the promise. 2. *It will be completely performed* God will bring home all banished ones, and recover all captives. (*a*) *All infirmities within shall be healed.* Their weakness and unworthiness only sets forth the freeness and fulness of Divine love. "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord" (Ezek. xxxvi. 22). (*b*) *All dangers without shall be removed.* The enemies will be repressed and rooted up, judged by God, to prepare for the restoration of Israel (Isa. lxvi. 15, 16). Dignity for disgrace, mercy for misery, and honour for insult. In every land where they have been reproached shall they be praised by the foe. They will then be "high above all nations which he hath made in praise, and in name, and in honour," &c. (Deut. xxvi. 19; xxx. 3). 3. *It will be visibly performed.* "Before your eyes, saith the Lord." However incredible, it shall be quite obvious to the sense. The testimony of the senses shall convince you. Believers will see the end of all their sufferings, realize all their hopes, and soon partake of the fulness of their redemption. **II. A restoration certain in its accomplishment.** The promise is repeated to make the assurance greater. One act of God makes way for another. When he begins he will finish his work. 1. *Unimpeded by outward enemies.* "I will undo all that afflict thee." God may be silent, but will not always sit still. He will *deal* with all according to their deserts. 2. *Unimpeded by internal weakness.* None can detain them in bondage. All difficulties will be easily surmounted. (*a*) *The weak shall be strengthened.* "I will save her that

halteth. (*b*) *The outcast shall be restored* "And gather her that was driven out." (*c*) *The captives shall be recovered.* "When I turn back your captivity." What a sublime prospect to God's people! They shall be redeemed from oppression, called together from the utmost ends of the earth—the maimed and the halt, the peasant and the priest—to be owned, guided, and fixed in their kingdom. Jew and Gentile, Barbarian and Scythian, shall become one fold, become the praise of the earth, and the glory of the universe. "*At that time*," the Christian Church will be a type of the Church of the first-born, which in the great day will be admired and glorified in Christ, and he in them. Then his kingdom will be established and perfected in the new Jerusalem. And the "redeemed out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" shall become kings and priests to God.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 20. The *period* of restoration distinctly prominent by pointed reference. *The manner* also remarkable. "*I will bring you in.*" I will *lead* you like a shepherd going before his flock, and *gather* you in due season, like the shepherd putting his flock into the fold. "For even these weak and helpless ones, who *limp*, and are *burdened*, and have been *dispersed*, are of the flock of the Lord, and will experience the faithful tender care of the Great Shepherd and Bishop of souls." "That time is the whole time of the gospel; the one day of salvation, in which all who shall ever be gathered, shall be brought into the New Jerusalem. The words were fulfilled, when at our *Lord's first coming* the remnant of the true Israel, those ordained to eternal life, were brought in. It shall be *fulfilled again*, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall be *come in*, and so all Israel shall be saved (Rom. xi. 25, 26). It shall *most perfectly* be fulfilled at the end, when there shall be no going out of those once brought in, and those who have gathered others into the Church shall be a name and a praise among all people of the earth" [*Pusey*].

Your captivity, lit. captivities of different ages and countries in Jewish and gospel history. "All personal and social captivities will be turned back like a stream. 'Turn our captivity, O Lord, as the rivers of the south' (Ps. cxxvi. 5); they will all flow into the Church of Christ. (See Isa. ii. 2: Mic. iv. 1). 'All nations shall flow into it'" [*Wordsworth*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1. *Polluted.* Sinful corruption is a poison so subtle, that it pierces into all the powers of the soul; so contagious, that it infects all the actions; so obstinate, that only omnipotent grace can heal it [*Dr. Bates*].

Ver. 2. *Instruction.* The end of learning is to know God, and out of that knowledge to love and imitate him. "That it may please thee to give to all thy people increase of grace to hear meekly thy word, to receive it with pure affection, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit" [*Litany*]. *Near to her God.* The essence of all wickedness is forsaking God [*Nichols*].

Ver. 3. *Avarice* is insatiable, and is always pushing on for more [*L'Estrange*].

"Fancy, and pride, seek things at vast expense,
Which relish not to reason, nor to sense."
[*Pope.*]

Ver. 4. *Treacherous.* "There is no love among Christians," cries the man destitute of true charity. "Zeal has vanished," exclaims the idle talker. "O for more consistency!" groans out the hypocrite. "We want more vital godliness," protests the false pretender. As in the old legend, the wolf preached against sheep-stealing, so very many hunt down those sins in others which they gladly shelter in themselves [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 5. *Just.* If there be one truth that speaks throughout the Bible like the voice of God, and resounds with all the

grandeur of the Divine intonation, it is the truth that God does not look with an equal eye upon the evil and the good, that He is a discriminator of character, a lover of that which is right, and a hater of that which is wrong [*H. W. Beecher*].

Vers. 6, 7. The desolation is complete, within as well as without; ruin itself is hardly so desolate as the empty habitations and forsaken streets, once full of life, where

"The echoes and the empty tread
Would sound like voices from the dead."
[*Pusey.*]

Ver. 8. The terrors of the Lord are great, but they do not exercise supreme sway in a human heart, and lead all its affections whithersoever they will. His anger is not a ruling, leading, drawing power. It is mighty, but not to save [*W. Arnot*].

Vers. 9 and 13. *Language.* Speech is the perfect expression of the senses. Words are but the representations of the disintegrated body of man [*Oken*] Christ became the one language of the whole world [*Jerome*]. *Deceitful tongue* (ver. 13). They employ words but to disguise their thoughts [*Voltaire*].

Vers. 14, 15. *Sing.* Thy words have larted hope into my soul, and comfort 'awns upon me [*Southern*].

"Joy is our duty, glory, health,
The sunshine of the soul;
Our best encomium on the Power
Who sweetly plans the whole" [*Young*].

Vers. 18—20. So with this scene of quiet pastoral felicity the poem closes; and Zephaniah, whose earlier words seemed to bespeak a veritable "son of thunder," proves himself to be a true "son of consolation," even as the judgment he was sent to denounce proves to be an act of sovereign and Divine mercy. Harsh and severe in husk, in outward seeming, its heart is "made of tenderness." It is like one of those fairy nuts in which, when they could be broken, there were found lustrous gems of price [*S. Cox*].

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

HAGGAI.

INTRODUCTION.

The Prophet. The name *Haggai* means *my feast;* given, according to Cocceius, in anticipation of the joyous return from exile. He was probably one of the Jewish exiles who returned under Zerubbabel, the civil head of the people, and Joshua the high priest, 536 B.C., when Cyrus (actuated by the striking prophecies as to himself (Isa. xliv. 28; xlv. 1), granted them their liberty, and furnished them with the necessaries for restoring the temple (2 Chron. xxxvi. 23: Ezra i. 1; ii. 2) [*Fausset*]. All we know of his personal history is gathered from his book (cn. i. 1; ii. 1, 10, 20: cf. Ezra v. 1; vi. 14). The traditions of Jewish writers seem to have no evidence to support them.

The Time. He is the tenth in order of the twelve minor prophets, and the first of the three who prophesied after the Captivity. He was preceded by Zechariah by about two months, and by Zephaniah 100 years. "His book itself vouches for the fact that he prophesied in the reign of Darius Hystaspis, who ascended the Persian throne B.C. 521. Having been interrupted in building the temple by an interdict, which the Samaritans obtained from Smerdis the usurper, the Jews became in some measure indifferent to the work; and when Darius came to the throne, an event which must have deprived the prohibition of all authority, instead of vigorously recommencing their labours, the more influential persons among them pretended that, as the prophecy of the 70 years applied to the temple as well as to the captivity in Babylon, and they were only yet in the 68th year, the proper time for rebuilding it had not arrived, and gave their whole attention to the erection of splendid mansions for themselves" [*Henderson*].

The Book. Consists of five addresses, which were delivered at successive periods within the short space of three months. They are very brief, and supposed to be only a summary or epitome of the original discourses. "The *first* discourse (chap. i. 1—11), is one of reproof, expostulation, and warning, being designed to arouse the people from their religious apathy, and, in especial, from their indifference to the condition of the temple, which was then lying desolate. The *second* discourse (i. 12—15), after a relation of the beneficial results of the first, holds out to them, in their returning obedience, the promise of God's returning favour and aid in their

work. The *third* discourse (ch. ii. 1—9), evoked by the despondency that had begun to affect some of the people on account of the outward inferiority of the present temple, predicts for it a glory far transcending that of its predecessor, since the treasures of all nations were yet to adorn the Church of the Messiah, of which it was the representative. The *fourth* discourse (ch. ii. 10—19), teaches them, from the principles of the Ceremonial Law, that no amount of outward religious observance can communicate holiness, or secure acceptance with God, and the restoration of his favour, the withdrawal of which had been so manifest in their late public and private distress. The *fifth* discourse assures the struggling community of their preservation in the midst of commotions which should destroy other nations, promising to its faithful rulers, represented by Zerubbabel, the special protection of their Covenant God" [*Lange*].

THE STYLE. Lacks the poetical qualities of the earlier prophecies, but is marked with passages of great vivacity and power, "to which, among other characteristics, the frequent use of the interrogation largely contributes (e. g. in chaps. i. 4, 9; ii. 3, 12, 13, 19). In addition to these more obvious characteristics, we can discern both rhetorical and grammatical peculiarities natural to the declining period of the Hebrew language and literature." The style of Haggai is consonant with his messages: pathetic in exhortation, vehement in reproofs, elevated in contemplating the glorious future. The repetition of the same phrases (e. g. *saith the Lord*, or, *the Lord of hosts* (ch. i. 2, 5, 7), and thrice in one verse (ch. ii. 4); so "the spirit" thrice in ch. i. 14) gives a simple earnestness to his style, calculated to awaken the solemn attention of the people, and to arouse them from apathy. Chaldaisms occur (ch. ii. 3, 6, 16) as might have been expected in a writer who was so long in Chaldea. Parts are purely prose history; the rest is somewhat rhythmical and observant of poetic parallelism [*Fausset*]. There are references to Haggai in Old and New Testament (Ezra v. 1; vi. 14: and Heb. xii. 20: cf. Hag. ii. 7, 8, 22).

THE PURPOSE of the book is to exhort to the rebuilding of the temple, but the predictions relate to the Church of God in all ages, and should evoke and perpetuate the spirit of obedience and love to Divine ordinances. To revive the drooping spirits of all engaged in the work of God, a future transcendent glory is revealed which shall crown their labours and embrace all the kingdoms of the earth.

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **By]** Lit. in the hand of Haggai, the prophet, merely a conscious medium, God the real speaker (cf. Acts vii. 35: Gal. iii. 19). **Governor]** *Pechah,* akin to the Turkish *Pasha,* one who rules a less country than a *Satrap.* **2. This]** Not my people, but reproachfully, *this people,* as in acts disowning him, and so deserving to be disowned by him [*Pusey*]. **Come]** *i. e.* to build. Two out of seventy predicted years of captivity unexpired: this a plea for delay (cf. *Henderson*). **3.]** A repetition, to give greater prominence to the antithesis. **4.]** God meets them with a question, and appeals to the conscience. **You]** Yourselves; the shameful contrast between them and Jehovah. **Cieled]** Heb. to *cover, wainscot,* or overlay with boards, "so that what is predicated of the houses is not to be confined to the ceiling, but must be extended to the walls which were thus covered, at once for comfort and ornament" [*Henderson*]. **5. Consider]** Lit. *set your heart upon; i. e.* consider your conduct and lay it to heart; a frequent formula with Haggai (cf. ver. 7; ch. ii. 15, 18). **6.]** The meaning of these clauses is, not that the small harvest was not sufficient to feed and clothe the people, but that even in their use of the little that had been reaped, the blessing of God was wanting, as evident not only from the words themselves, but placed beyond doubt by ver. 9 [*Keil*]. **Holes]** A torn bag was proverbial for money spent without profit (cf. Isa. lv. 2: Jer. ii. 13: Zech. viii. 10). Necessities were dear, and a day's wage to purchase them, as if put into a bag with holes. **8.]** The summons repeated. They were not required to buy, but simply to give their labour, and bring timber from the mountainous country where trees grew. Cyrus granted cedars from Lebanon for the building of the temple (Ezra iii. 7; vi. 3, 4). **Pleasure]** God displeased when it was in ruins. **Glorified]** Be propitious to suppliants, and so receive the honour due to me (1 Kings viii. 30). **9. Looked]** Lit. Ye turned towards much, inspecting frequently the growing crops (Exod. xvi. 10). **Blow]** I dissipated, blighted with my breath, the little gathered into barns. **Because]** Most emphatic. **Run]** Indicating the eagerness with which they pursued their own affairs and sought for self-indulgence. **10.]** The curse further depicted, with an evident play upon the punishment with which transgressors are threatened in the law (Lev. xxvi. 19, 20: Deut. xi. 17; xxviii. 23, 24) [*Keil*]. **11. I]** The first cause: heaven and earth **(ver. 10)**, the visible and second causes. **Drought]** Affecting man and beast, through vegetation. "The word is carefully chosen, to express the idea of the *lex talionis.* Because the Jews left the house of God *chārēbh,* they were punished with *chōrebh*" [*Keil*]. **All]** Comprehending the cultivation of the soil and labour for the necessities of life. **12—15]** The result of reproof. **Obey]** *i. e.* to lay to heart, so as to obey what was heard. **Fear]** The first-fruit of hearing; the second given ver. 14. **13]** The penitence of the people with their rulers, met with the promise of Divine aid. **Messenger** (cf. Mal. ii. 7: Gal. iv. 14). **Message]** *i. e.* invested with his authority and commission. **14. Stirred]** To awaken the spirit of a man is to make him willing and glad to carry out his resolutions (cf. 1 Chron. v. 26: 2 Chron. xxi. 16: Ezra i. 1—5). God gave them energy and perseverance in the work. **Did]** Thus, filled with joyfulness, courage, and strength, they began the work on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius (ver. 15); that is to say, twenty-three days after Haggai had first addressed his challenge to them. The interval had been spent in deliberation and counsel, and in preparations for carrying out the work [*Keil*].

HOMILETICS.

THE CALL TO DUTY.—*Verses* 1, 2.

The prophet addresses the people through their rulers, and seeks to rouse them to their work. The first day, the day of the new moon and a time of festal sacrifice, was an appropriate time. On such a day they must have been conscious of the ruins of the temple, and the work they had to do. In season and out of season God calls to duty.

I. A call through an inspired messenger. The prophet was invested with a Divine commission, and spoke with Divine authority. The voice was human, but the "word" was from Jehovah. He entrusts ministers with His words and works, and they should dispense them, as faithful stewards, to his people. This is a motive, an encouragement, and a help to perform his will. **II. A call to all people.** The people were only few, a remnant, but none must excuse (vers 12 and

14). 1. *To the prince.* "Unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel." The prince of royal blood, the governor of the land, was not to be exempt. 2. *To the priest.* "And to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest." The heads in civil and religious authority, rulers in Church and State, were jointly responsible for the negligence of the people. Great and good men must be stirred up when they grow remiss. Men in high position have greater opportunities of knowing, and should set a better example in doing, God's will. No institution must be set aside, and no social elevation must excuse from duty. 3. *To the people.* The few are addressed through their officials. All have equal share and equal responsibility. Duty is the cry to all. Duty only is truth, and there is no true religion but in its accomplishment. This alone is the end of the highest life, and the truest happiness is derived from the consciousness of its fulfilment. Duty performed, says George Herbert, "gives us music at midnight." "The word *duty* seems to me," says one, "the biggest word in the world, and is the uppermost in all my serious doings." This call to duty is loud, continual, and urgent. "Whatsoever he saith to you, do it."

THE GUILTY EXCUSES FOR DELAY IN DUTY.—*Verses* 2—4.

The people are charged with neglect in their work, bereft of every excuse to justify their negligence, and refuted in their pretences by their own sinful conduct. They did not question the call, nor deny the obligation to duty, but were criminal in delaying it.

I. They were actuated by selfishness. They dwelt in ceiled houses, adorned them with comforts and luxuries, while the temple was in ruins. They were more concerned for themselves than for the cause of God. They were not poor in *means*, but in *spirit*. Self-love will hinder all effort to repair and build the house of God. It is fatal to spiritual interests. "Woe to you who join house to house, and field to field, and regard not the work of the Lord." **II. They were hindered through fear.** They might urge that their relation with Persia was not favourable, and that the edict to cease labour, were reasons for inaction. But this was a more pretext. They had made no effort to discover the mind of the legitimate king, Darius Hystaspis. Their neglect was not the opposition to zealous patriots and ardent worshippers, but the selfish indifference of an unfaithful people. The intrigues of the enemies, and cowardice, determined them from serious effort. They grew fainthearted through difficulty (Ezra iii. 11—13; iv. 4). "Woe unto him that is faint-hearted," says the son of Sirach. No blessings equal a stout heart in the service of God. Cherish the spirit of Nehemiah, "The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we, his servants, will arise and build." **III. They delayed in presumption.** "This people say, The time is not come." Ingenious in excuses, they declared that interruptions proved that the proper time to build had not arrived. "God hath interposed many difficulties to punish our rash haste" [*Calvin*], why then work till the full period is expired? Many, like the Jews, do not say, Never, but *not yet*. Conscience will not let them say, We will *never* be religious and work for God; but they procrastinate—put off till to-morrow what should be done to day (2 Cor. vi. 1, 2), and thus leave the great work of life undone. The time is always come to him who wishes to do right. In his providence and by his prophets, God calls now. The present is the opportunity to respond, undertake, and finish the work which God has given us to do. Should worldlings exert themselves for pleasure and self-indulgence, and the servants of God stand back amid the ruins of the temple, and the loss of immortal souls? "Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob" (Ps. cxxxii. 3—5: 2 Sam. vii. 2.)

A Missionary Sermon.—*Verse* 4.

The captivity of Babylon had passed away. The Jews were now called to rebuild the second temple, and restore the worship of God. Adversaries watched them, and tried to cause their work to cease for a time. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were raised up to urge them to begin afresh. This state of things existed in other periods of the world. To excite you to zeal and greater diligence in the cause of God, look at the words in the following aspects—

I. **As representing a depression in the cause of God.** "The house of God lieth waste." There is a painful imperfection in the work of God in the present day. What are the scenes in *lands where Christianity is professed?* In our own land the cause of God is depressed. Much that is opposed to purity and happiness abounds. In other countries which bear the name of Christendom, in the continent of Europe, we behold the strong-holds of the prince of the power of the air—mystic Babylon, having in her hand the cup full of abominations. Over the vast portions of the East reigns the vile impostor in barbarism and sensuality. Beyond these are the regions of heathenism. The light is only just gathering which is to dissipate the darkness, and change the world into brightness and beauty. Are we not compelled to say, "the temple of God lieth waste"? II. **As describing a pursuit of temporal gratification on the part of those confessedly attached to the cause of God.** All neglect exertions which God justly demands. Some think the cause is *impolitic*, others that it is *unjust*. *Generally*, it is often a lamentation that large portions of wealth, talent, and influence in the world are not devoted to God. More *particularly*, is there sufficient exercise of talent and opportunity? Do not the principles of selfishness prevent us from making sacrifices which ought to be made? From the period of the Reformation, little has been done to purify the Church and advance its interests. The spirit of missions has to Christianize the Church, before the Church can Christianize the world. The time must come when wealth, splendour, talents, and influence must dedicate their most hallowed powers to God. *Individual exertion* is still very imperfect in the great cause. Let each consider how much of his time, natural gifts, and property have been given to promote the interests of his fellow-men. It will be little indeed, while an immense portion of each has been given to the world. Contrast our state with the votaries of false religion, Mahommedanism, and heathenism. Think of almost incredible sums devoted to degrading superstitions. Think of Whitfield and others, whose memory we cherish; emulate their zeal and catch their spirit. **III. As challenging the employment of our various talents, and urging the claims of God.** 1. Consider the nature of those obligations under which God has placed you, and regard the services which you are called to render. 2. Consider the peculiar nature of the gospel which you have embraced. 3. Consider that while there is not energy in the cause of God, there is an awful amount of misery resting upon your fellow-men. 4. Consider the prospect of success. God has promised that every enemy shall be overcome—that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established upon the tops of the mountains—that he will cause peace and righteousness to prevail in all the earth, and that the world shall be given to Christ, and filled with the glory and power of his grace [*James Parsons*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. *Joshua*, the high priest, was a type of Christ. 1. In his name, which signifieth a Saviour 2. In his office of high priesthood. 3. In his partner agency with Zerubbabel, in bringing the people home to their country [*Trapp*] Together they are types of him, the true King and true Priest, Christ Jesus, who by the Resurrection raised again the true Temple, his body, after it had been destroyed [*Pusey*].

Ver. 2. "This people," instead of

"My people." The loss of God's confidence. 1. Its occasions. 2. Its consequences. 3. Its retrieval [*Lange*]. "This people *say*." Words then have their weight; neither are men's tongues their own; but there is a Lord over them (Ps. xii. 4), that will call them to a strict account of all waste words (Matt. xii. 36), and hard speeches (Jude 15). He that weighs his words before he utters them, shall prevent an after-reckoning for them [*Trapp*].

The time is not come. 1. An indication of the wrong spirit. 2. A misinterpretation of Divine providence. 3. A manifestation of disobedience. 4. An expectation of times without difficulty. Never lay by present duty, for which you have positive command, in anticipation of plainer providence or better days—

"The primal duties shine aloft, like stars."
[*Wordsworth.*]

Vers. 2—4. There is a time for everything with men; but they should consider—1. Who it is that claims their first and most devoted service. 2. The means and methods of serving him best [*Lange*]. Men are very ingenious when they wish to hide their delinquencies [*Calvin*]. Many have plenty of money when they build houses for themselves, but great scarcity of it when it is wanted for churches, schools, or anything to promote God's glory [*Cramer*].

HOMILETICS.

Human Thoughtlessness.—*Verse* 5.

Having reproved their sinful negligence, the prophet urges them to a serious consideration of their ways. Why should the earth be deprived of produce and their labour of profit through their ingratitude and folly? From the results of their conduct they may discern the principles of moral government, and the proofs of their guilt.

I. Men should seriously consider their ways. Solemnly and prayerfully lay them to heart. Are they *reasonable?* Nature is governed by force, and brutes driven with the lash, but men should act under the influence of thought and reason, in gratitude to God,—and a feeling of responsibility. To be the slave of habit, or to be under the dominion of lust, is most unreasonable. Are they *safe?* If opposed to God's word they are sinful and dangerous. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man: but the end thereof are the ways of death." Will they *end* well? Every action tends to good or evil. Thoughts, words, and deeds are the germs of future harvest. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." **II. Men do not seriously consider their ways.** Thoughtlessness is *common* in spiritual affairs,—some occasionally, and others never, consider. Indifference, prejudice, and habit operate upon the mind. The greatest difficulty is to make men think. Thoughtlessness in spiritual affairs is *inconsistent.* Men think intensely and act eagerly in business. When self-interests are at stake they are considerate enough; but in most important concerns careless and guilty. "My people doth not consider." **III. God urges men to consider their ways.** God's *servants* call continually upon them to reflect upon their character, condition, and doom. God's *providence* warns them of their danger. They have been chastised time after time, to rouse them to consideration and repentance. Sorrows and griefs, disappointments and embittered cups, have brought no change. Once more God calls. Consider *now* before it be too late to consider. Neglect, want of thought, will be attended with consequences as fearful as open rebellion. "Son, do nothing without counsel, and when thou hast done it thou wilt not repent" (Ecclus. xxxii. 19).

"Evil is wrought by want of thought
As well as want of heart" [*Hood*].

Due Consideration of our Ways should Teach us the Will, and urge us to the Work, of God.—*Verses* 6—8.

The admonition of ver. 5 is repeated (ver. 7), both as betokening greater urgency, and also for the purpose of reinforcing the argument of vers. 5, 6, by showing to what course a conscientious review of their conduct should determine them. They should be impelled, as is next shown, to make immediate preparations for the complete restoration of the temple [*Lange*].

I. Consideration of our ways should teach us the will of God. Lack of consideration led to disobedience. When the Jews therefore did not hearken to the word of God, they lost his favour and providential care, which secure fruitful seasons and social enjoyment. They were under the visible curse of the law (Deut. xxviii.). God's will was read—1. *In fields without produce.* "Ye have sown much, and bring in little." God disappoints our expectations from the creature that we may fix them on him. 2. *In daily necessities without enjoyment.* "Ye eat, but have not enough," &c. If men would seek first the kingdom of God, they would secure the secondary things of life (Matt. vi. 33). 3. *In labour without remuneration.* Wages earned were spent without profit. They laid up treasures for themselves and lost them. Nothing will prosper if we neglect known duty. "The events of life are the hieroglyphics in which God records his feelings towards us," says Moore. He speaks in the failure of the crops, and the loss of the merchandise. He diminishes the customers of the tradesman, and scatters the wealth of the rich, to correct in sin and restore to duty. **II. Consideration of our ways should urge us to the work of God.** "Go up to the mountain," &c. (ver. 8). They were to rouse themselves, collect materials, and begin to build. When we seriously consider our life and are convinced of our sins, we shall amend our ways, engage with diligence in needful and neglected duty. "Amendment of life is the best repentance; neither is there any wiser way to break off our sins than to practise the contrary duties" [*Luther*]. In neglecting God's commands we dishonour him; but earnest obedience will secure his blessing. "I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 5. *Consider.* The religion of the Bible is a reasonable service. We are not forced like a machine into insensible workings and results. We are here taught that while God is the author of all good, and our progress in goodness is from him, yet he does not *carry* us along in the way everlasting, but enables us to *walk.* He works *in* us, but it is that he may *will* and *do.* We are not only impressed, but employed. Thus all true religion arises from *consideration* [*Jay*].

Ver. 6. *Withholding from God's cause tends to poverty.* Willingly devote a portion of your possessions to his glory, there will be sweetness in the remainder which the worldling can never enjoy (Prov. xiii. 25). He will "bless us in basket and in store." "As long as the sin lasted, so long the punishment. The visitation itself was *twofold;* impoverished harvests, so as to supply less sustenance; and various indisposition of the frame, so that what would, by God's appointment in nature, satisfy, gladden, warm, failed of its effect" [*Pusey*].

The bag with holes, contrasted with "*bags that wax not old*" (Luke xii. 33). We provide for a large store in future, by a wise and generous use of what we have in the present. "Lord, thou knowest where I have laid up my treasure," cried Paulinus, when he heard that the Goths had sacked Nola and taken all he had.

Ver. 8. 1. *The work to do.* Go up, bring wood, and build the house. A divine task, a holy urge it is for

God a spiritual temple to build. All may help. 2. *The motive to perform it.* "I will take pleasure in it." God would accept them and their labours. 3. *The result.* "I will be glorified, saith the Lord." (1) God is glorified in man's service to him. (2) In the manifestations of his grace to man. "God will not come to bless us as an uninvited guest. His favour will be displayed towards us only when we have prepared him a temple in our hearts" [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

Haggai i. 8.

Important events in the spiritual world have been symbolized by things in the natural. In this event—

I. Observe an important operation directed. The nature of the operation is, "the building of a house," *i. e.* the house or temple of God upon Mount Zion. The spiritual import of it, with which we have to do, is the formation and gradual perfecting, through successive ages, of the Church of God, which is compared to a temple. Observe its attendant difficulties. Numerous adversaries around them. Obstacles from the Jews themselves. scanty in number, and feeble in resource. Some depressed and fearful, others indifferent and apathetic. These facts set forth the circumstances attendant on the erection of the temple of Divine grace under the gospel of Christ. That work progresses, amid difficulties and opposition, in numerous forms; heathen imposture, infidel impiety, antichristian superstition, worldly contempt, neglect and indolence of the Church. **II. Observe the agency with which this operation is conducted.** 1. *An instrumental and secondary agency.* The devoted labours of converted men, under the impulse of renovated nature, influencing others; their success being as the bringing of materials by which the temple is built. 2. *Distinct mention is made of Divine agency.* This agency is connected with the instrumentality of men; directs them in their counsels, gives efficiency and success to their movements. **III. Observe the result, in which this operation, so conducted, shall terminate.** 1. *The operation shall be triumphantly completed.* The second temple was finished in a brief space of time. 2. *Being triumphantly completed, it will eminently redound to the glory of God.* "I will be glorified in it, saith the Lord." This completion will be hailed with rapture by holy created beings. When the second temple was finished, they brought out the headstone "with shoutings, crying, grace," &c. Ezra says that they kept the dedication with songs, and that they were delighted in the achievement of their work. We may anticipate the same delight in the victories of truth and the subjugation of the universe to Christ. Redeemed men will rejoice, and angels in heaven will partake in their pleasure. *Application from the whole.* 1. What encouragement here for those already labouring for God. 2. What rebuke here to those who profess the religion of Jesus, yet are indolent and inactive. 3. What warning here to those avowedly hostile to God and his truth [*Preacher's Treasury*].

Duty Vindicated by Divine Government.—*Verses* 5—11.

I. The Divine government recognizes the selfish motives which actuate men. First, the necessity of moral reform in the world. Secondly, the necessity of attending more to the spiritual than the formal in the Church. Thirdly, the possibility of solemn disclosure at the last day. **II. The Divine government avenges selfish motives which actuate men.** "Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little." 1. God neutralizes the fruits of their labour. "I will blow upon it." 2. God renders inefficient the materials of their labour. Learn—(1) That God directs the universe. "I called." (2) That God directs the universe to mind. "Why?"

(3) That God directs the universe to meet the state of every heart. "Because" (ver. 9). "Therefore" (ver. 10). [Adapted from *The Homilist.*]

THE DOUBLE CURSE.—*Verses* 9—11.

To stir them up, the evidences of God's anger are again put before them. All sought their own things, and neglected the things of God. He therefore disappointed their hopes of harvest, and withheld his blessing from that which they gathered into the barn. "God punishes men in both ways, both by withdrawing his blessing, so that the earth is parched, and the heaven gives no rain; and also, even when there is a good supply of the fruits of the earth, by preventing their satisfying, so that there is no real enjoyment of them" [*Calvin*]. **I. Little was reaped when much was expected.** "Ye looked for much," &c. Their toil had been great. They sowed much (ver. 6), and kept much ground under tillage. They expected much, enough and plenty to spare. But the greater their hopes, the more bitter their disappointment. **II. Little was reaped, and that little withered away.** "When ye brought it home," &c. Stroke follows stroke, and men are punished in their homes and possessions. Portions, little or great, are easily scattered by the blast of the Almighty. **III. The cause of this double curse.** 1. The cause should *be sought.* "The curse causeless does not come." Afflictions do not spring from the ground, nor trouble rise from the dust. God appeals to the awakened conscience. "Why?" 2. The cause may *be found.* "Because of mine house that is waste," &c. (*a*) In duty neglected. Absorbed in material interests, they had no time for God's work. Men seek their own, more than the things of Jesus Christ (Phil. ii. 21). (*b*) In Divine retribution for duty neglected. "Therefore the heaven over you is stayed," &c. God rules the world in the interests of humanity. Heaven and earth are at his command, to bless or curse. Spiritual indifference results in temporal distress, and ruin falls upon an unfaithful people. "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 9. *Mine house* waste, ye *run* every man, &c. Apathy in spiritual matters, zeal in selfish (Prov. i. 16: cf. Ps. cxix. 132). *Concern for the spiritual wants of men.* 1. The situation of mankind, in a moral and religious view, is such as ought to awaken the unaffected concern of good men. 2. Men who properly care for the spiritual state of their fellow-beings are rarely to be found. This was the case in the time of Haggai; Paul (Phil. ii. 21); and is so now. 3. Some of the principal causes of this unconcern. 1. An inordinate and criminal self-love. 2. The prevalence of unbelief. 3. Despondency [*Dr. Payson*].

Ver. 10. He "calls for" famine, &c., as instruments of his wrath (2 Kings viii. 1: Ps. cv. 16). The contrast is striking between the prompt obedience of these material agencies and the slothful disobedience of living man, his people [*Fausset*].

House wasted, and drought. Heb. *châreb and chorebh.* Wasted temple and wasted substance. Divine retribution in human conduct, the correspondence between the *sin* and its *punishment.* "The very evils which men think to escape by neglecting God's ordinances, they actually bring on themselves by such unbelieving conduct" [*Fausset*].

HOMILETICS.

The Performance of Neglected Duty.—*Verses* 12—15.

The effect of the prophet's words upon the people was powerful and abiding, and upon the very first indication of a change in their disposition, he is commissioned to tell them that God's favour had already returned, and that he would assist them in their labours. The work is then speedily recommenced under the influence of that new zeal with which Jehovah inspires both leaders and people [*Lange*].

I. Duty performed in the right spirit. It is a critical time when individuals and societies are warned by the voice of God in his word and works Weal or woe depends upon submission or rejection. The Jews returned to duty. 1. *In a spirit of obedience.* "They obeyed the voice of the Lord their God." (*a*) *Universally.* "Zerubbabel and Joshua, with all the remnant of the people." (*b*) *Sincerely.* "According to the words of Haggai the prophet." 2. *In a spirit of humility.* "The people did fear before the Lord." They dreaded Divine wrath, regarded Divine authority, and trembled at the word of God. When the word expounds the providence of God, men often discern their sins, and serve the Lord with fear. **II. Duty performed by Divine help.** When God saw the penitence of the people, even before they began to work, he passes from reproof to tenderness and encouragement. 1. *By the teaching of the prophet.* "Then spake Haggai, the Lord's messenger, in the Lord's message." The direction of the prophet was clear, constant, and authoritative. 2. *By the stirring up of the people.* "The Lord stirred up" the spirit of prince, priest, and the remnant of the people. Though slothful in themselves, God gave them strength, alacrity, and joy in their work. He strengthens the feeblest hand, warms the coldest heart, and imparts every necessary influence to revive his work. 3. *By the manifestation of his presence.* "I am with you, saith the Lord." This includes all other blessings, and is the sure guarantee of success. Nothing more inspirits men, and rouses them from torpor, than promise of Divine aid and successful issue of work. But God's presence is conditioned to the Church by obedience only (Matt. xxviii. 20). "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. viii. 31: 2 Cor. xii. 9).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 12, 13. 1. For the word to be effectual, God's authority must be seen and acknowledged in the message and messenger. "Haggai, the Lord's messenger, in the Lord's message." 2. When God is thus seen in his Divine authority and covenant relation, men will submit themselves, and encourage others to do the same. Zerubbabel and Joshua first, and then all the remnant of the people, obeyed. 3. When we consider that God can bless beyond all probability — for here, by one sermon, all the people set about a long-neglected duty, in the midst of many difficulties—it should encourage God's servants to go on with their work [cf. *Hutcheson*]. This was the beginning of a conversion. In this one thing they began to do what, all along in their history, and most in their decay before the captivity, they refused to do—obey God's word [*Pusey*]. Successful preachers need not ascribe to themselves the merit of the results of their labours. It is the voice of God which makes their hearers listen. Whom God makes strong for his service, he first subdues to his fear [*Lange*].

Ver. 13. "*I am with you.*" Here all former threatening is recalled, and all former disobedience forgiven [*Burck*]. All the needs and longings of the creature are summed up in those two words, I *with you* [*Pusey*]. 1. *Consider who speaks*—a Divine Being. No other could promise and fulfil. This specially needed to give assurance, joy, and success. 2. *Consider to whom God speaks.* Jews, weak, harassed, and dispirited. Then to all represented by them. Preachers,

teachers, and all Christian workers. How should this promise enspirit and strengthen! "God's promises are a defence against man's threatenings" [*Mason*].

Vers. 13, 14. The presence of God in our labours: 1. The conditions on which it may be secured; 2. Its influence upon our souls; 3. Its consequences in our achievements [*Lange*].

Ver. 15. The time is diligently noted, to teach us to take good note of the moments, wherein matters of moment have been, by God's help, begun, continued, and perfected in the Church. This will be of singular use to increase our faith and affect our hearts [*Trapp*]. Let those who have fallen into spiritual torpor, but are now awakened, endeavour as far as possible to make up for time past, by redoubled diligence for whatever time may be left. The longer we have loitered, the more let us henceforth redeem the time in self-devoting labours for the Lord [*Fausset*].

"'Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours,
And ask them what report they bore to heaven,
And how they might have borne more welcome news" [*Young*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1. *In* its very *first day,* when the grief for the barren years was yet fresh, Haggai was stirred to exhort them to consider their ways; a pattern for Christian preachers to bring home to people's souls the meaning of God's judgments. God directs the very day to be noted in which he called the people anew to build his temple, both to show the readiness of their obedience, and a precedent to us to keep in memory days and seasons in which he stirs our souls to build more diligently his spiritual temple in our souls [*Pusey.*]

Vers. 2—4. The disingenuousness of their plea is self-evident, and is assumed in the following discourse, which is intended to awaken in them a sense of their ingratitude to God. It is represented to them most impressively, with an allusion to the very language of their pretext, that while they held their own wants, and even their luxuries, to be matters of pressing moment, they thought any time suitable to attend to the claims of their God; that while their own houses had been regained, there was yet no habitation for the God of Israel; that while their wealthy members were using their superfluous means to adorn and beautify their dwellings, God's dwelling-place still lay desolate, appealing in vain to their piety and patriotism, which had been overborne by selfishness and supineness. The allusion, moreover, could not fail to expose the insincerity of their excuses. If some of them had now the command of such resources as enabled them to live in princely splendour, they might surely have reserved a portion for the requirements of the temple, when the work of building it should be resumed, if that work had been giving them the least concern [*Lange*].

Ver. 6. *Holes.* Money is seen in the pierced bag when it is cast in, but when it is lost it is not seen. They then who look how much they give, but do not weigh how much they gain wrongly, cast their rewards into a pierced bag [*St. Gregory*].

Vers. 5 and 7. *Consider.*

"Come, then, sad thought, and let us meditate,
While meditate we may. We have now
But a small portion of what men call time,
To hold communion" [*H. K. White*].

Vers. 9—11. *Looked.* We are too apt to misjudge the dispensations of Providence when we wish them with our own wishes [*Skelton*]. The good things of Providence may be considered as having this inscription, "*Accipe, redde, cave,*" that is, "accept us as from God, return us in gratitude to him, and take care not to abuse us" [*Wilson*].

Vers. 8, 12—15. *Obeyed.* The longer the soul hath neglected duty, the more ado there is to get it taken up; partly through shame, the soul having played the truant, knows not how to look God in the face, and partly from the difficulty of the work, being double to what another finds that walks in the exercise of his grace. It requires more time for him to tune his instrument than

for another to play the lesson [*An old Divine*]. Those who give to God only the shadow of duty, can never expect from him a real reward [*Flavel*].

"Never anything can be amiss,
When simpleness and duty tender it."
[*Shakespeare.*]

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This oracle, delivered nearly a month after building had begun, designed to remove despondency, and to meet a new difficulty. **3.**] The glory of the second did not answer to that of the former temple. Some of the oldest who had returned, had seen the first building, and wept at the contrast (Ezra iii. 12). The Jews note five points of inferiority. The absence (1) of the sacred fire; (2) the shekinah; (3) the ark and cherubim; (4) the Urim and Thummim; (5) the spirit of prophecy. **Nothing**] God makes the contrast as great as possible, seems to share their feeling, and give evidence of his strong sympathy. **4. Yet**] whatever your estimate, I give another. **Strong**] Fear not, I am with you. **Work**] David's words to Solomon (1 Chr. xxviii. 10: 2 Chr. xix. 11). **5. Covenanted**] God the same in promise to all generations and ages (Ex. xix. 5, 6; xxiv. 10, 11). **Spirit**] to strengthen (cf. i. 14: Zech. xiv. 6), hence continual enjoyment of God's presence and aid. **6. Once**] Yet only a little while; lit. *one* little, *i. e.* brief space; till a series of movements is to begin. **Shake**] by great moral and physical revolutions, preparatory to the establishment of Christ's kingdom (Matt. xxiv. 29: Heb. xii. 26—28). **7.**] Having figuratively set forth great political changes, the prediction is repeated, and the arrival of the blessings desired, announced. **Desire**] Some apply these words to the Church, but the majority to Christ. This is not the place for a discussion [cf. *Henderson and Wordsworth*]. **Glory**] Not outward furniture, but the presence of God himself (cf. Zech. ii. 5: Ezek. xliii. 4, 5: Ex. xl. 34, 35: 1 Kings viii. 11). **8. Mine**] Hence they should be free from anxiety in poverty, and cease to mourn the absence from the temple of these things. **9. Greater**] Not in architectural splendour, but in the presence of Jehovah the Messiah, and in peace between man and man, and God and man—temporal peace under Persian rule, and spiritual in Jesus Christ. **10.**] This prophecy two months later than those preceding in this chapter. **11—13.**] To convince them of their unworthiness, they must learn from their legal advisers two things—no holy objects could communicate holiness to things or persons who touched them (Lev. vi. 20); but whatever an unclean person touched was unclean (Num. xix. 22). **14. So**] The nation in its attitude toward the Lord resembles, on the one hand, a man who carries holy flesh in the lappet of his garment; and, on the other, a man who has become unclean through touching a corpse" [*Keil*]. **Unclean**] By their habits of sin, all their worship, character, and lives were impure. **15. Consider**] Review of their condition from the present specific time to the period before resumption of work—"to connect their distress, then suffered, with their unfaithfulness." They had *ten* measures when they expected *twenty*; twenty vessels instead of fifty from the press-vat; they were smitten with two blights of corn which were predicted as chastisements for disobedience (Deut xxviii. 27: Amos iv. 9); yet none *turned* to God. **18.**] Resumed from ver. 15, after vers. 16, 17, that the blessing in ver. 19 may stand in the more marked contrast with the curse in vers. 16, 17 [*Fausset*]. **19.**] After an appeal to lay to heart past times, in which blessings had been withheld, they must now fix their eyes upon the time now beginning. "It is winter (ver. 10); the seed, only just committed to the earth, was not yet in the barn. No fresh leaves on the fruit-trees—vine, fig tree, pomegranate, and olive—but ye have begun again to build; from this day forward I will hasten to bless you" [*Wordsworth*]. **20-23.**] Renewal of promise to save in convulsions. **21. Shake**] Points back to vers. 6 and 7. **22. Throne**] Government which binds nations together (Dan. vii. 27). War-chariots, horses, and riders, military power, and support of kingdoms, to be overthrown by one another's sword. "One hostile kingdom will destroy another, and in the last conflict the heathen hosts will annihilate one another" (cf. Ezek. xxxviii. 21: Zech. xiv. 13) [*Keil*]. **23.**] At that time Jehovah would take Zerubbabel, invest him with power and authority as head over all, as kings depute viceroys by giving them their signet (Esth. iii. 10; viii. 2). Some think, as seals and rings were objects of great value and regard, so Zerubbabel would be dear, and held close, to God—an object of incessant care and delight (Jer. xxii. 24: Cant. viii. 6). In a theocratic sense he restored the reign of David. What was promised to him was equally promised to all faithful rulers of Judah. They would be guardians of the people, and should stand secure amid the fall of earthly kingdoms. This prosperity and triumph of old prefigured the Redeemer's reign, whom God would exalt on the throne of David (Matt. i. 12: Luke iii. 2), crown as king of the earth (Ps. lxxxix. 27), and endow with a kingdom which will never be destroyed (Dan. ii. 44: Heb. xii. 28: 1 Cor. xv. 24).

HOMILETICS.

METHODS IN DIVINE TEACHING.—*Verses* 1, 2.

Rebukes, warnings, and encouragements had due influence upon the people. But new difficulties now threaten and a fresh message is required. Hence "came the word of the Lord" again, in matter and method adapted to guide and comfort.

I. God speaks to his people in different periods of time. "In the *seventh month*, in the *one and twentieth day* of the month." In vers. 1, 10, 18, and chap. i. 1, 15, how specific the mention of time! no age is left without its prophet and Divine utterance. **II. God speaks to his people in different circumstances of life.** The Jews had passed through circumstances of indolence and zeal. Now they begin to despond on account of an inferior temple and failing harvests (vers. 9—11). But when God stirs up a people he will help and comfort them in their work. "Set the wheels a going and God will oil them," says an old writer. **III. God speaks to his people in words adapted to their needs.** We have warnings and comfort, "consider" and "fear not," "go up and build" (chap. i. 8). Revelations are given "in sundry times and in divers manners," in parts and methods according to our requirements. Germs for present use and future growth. "Whatsoever is Divine revelation ought to overrule all our opinions, prejudices, and interests, and hath a right to be received with full assent," says Locke. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

CAUSES OF DESPONDENCY IN THE WORK OF GOD.—*Verse* 3.

The inferiority of the second temple to that of Solomon was a ground of discouragement in work. The old people affected the young, and though disappointment was not openly expressed, yet it suspended their labours.

I. Many disaffected discouraged others in the work. Some old men were still alive, who thought more of former performances and attainments than present duty and hopeful signs. They discouraged others, exaggerated the evils and reflected upon the work of God. Murmurers and complainers belong to every age. "If the times are bad what are we doing to mend them?" asks one. "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." **II. All esteemed the work too lightly.** "Is it not in your eyes, in comparison of it, as nothing." They thought more of outward glory than spiritual blessings. We are too apt to judge by outward appearance, and forget *God's* estimate of labour. Though we are not building a material we are a spiritual temple. If not honoured with the position of some, we have responsibilities and duties. Never say that you do *nothing*, if not surrounded with outward pomp, and patronized by the rich and the noble. Let us "serve our own generation by the will of God."

REMEDIES FOR DESPONDENCY IN THE WORK OF GOD.—*Verses* 4, 5.

Notwithstanding alleged grounds of fainting, God exhorts them all to be courageous, to go on with their work, and gives reasons for the exhortation.

I. God's covenant with them is unchangeable. "According to the word that I covenanted with you, when ye came out of Egypt." Mercies to God's people are ensured by a pledge which is eternal and immutable. Dark may be the days and difficult the work of his people; but they are as much the object of his care as when the covenant was first ratified. They may sin and be punished for their sin; but his attitude towards them is not the result of caprice nor change. Unfaithfulness will banish God from us, but return to obedience will restore his favour and help. "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."

II. God's presence with them is guaranteed. "For I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts." God continually declares that we have no ground for fear. We need to have these assurances repeated. If hosts are against us, and the Lord of hosts is with us, this should strengthen us. His presence will compensate for past distress, aid in present duty, and be all-sufficient for the untried future. "The promises of the gospel are sealed to us by the word of the Father, the blood of the Son, and the witness of the Spirit" [*Mason*]. **III. God's Spirit with them abides for ever.** "So my Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not." God's Spirit was with the *leaders*, inspiring the prophets and sanctifying the priests; with the *people* for the work of the sanctuary (Ex. xxxi. 1), and the confirmation of the weak. The Spirit to stir up all to duty (Ezra v. 1: Zech. iv. 6), and remove every hindrance to its performance. The Spirit still abides in the Church, helping to realize the Divine purpose in Christ. "Thou gavest also thy good Spirit to instruct them." This should furnish, 1. an antidote to fear, 2. a ground of confidence, and 3. a motive to renewed consecration. "Be strong and work: for I am with you" (ver. 4).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. The better to hearten them, the prophet is sent again, with a like message as before. Learn—1. That there are none so forward for God and his work but may stand in need of continual quickening. 2. That continual preaching makes men continue in well-doing [*Trapp*]. 3. That all those who work for the Lord will be strengthened and encouraged in their difficulties. *Speak now*, &c. "The encouragements here are sent to the same persons to whom the reproofs in the foregoing chapter are directed; for those that are wounded by the convictions of the word shall be healed and bound up by its consolations."

Ver. 3. Important questions. What answers to be given? Some were left who had seen the first house in its glory, about sixty-eight years since. The contrast in the times and in the buildings no ground for despair. "Long life is a blessing to the servant of God, if at its close he is permitted to see the revival of God's kingdom and increasing signs of its coming glory" [*Lange*]. *In your eyes*, that is, in your, thoughts: for God taketh notice of the inward workings of the heart [*Trapp*]. Whatever they thought of the work, God's estimate was very different. Judge not by appearances.

Vers. 4, 5. *Lessons of life.* Dwell much upon past history, and learn—1. That what checks and distress may be experienced are due to unfaithfulness. 2. That God never failed to fulfil his covenant, whether he chastened or blessed. 3. That in the adversities of the present true hope lies in the presence and power of the Spirit [cf. *Lange*].

Ver. 4. *Be strong.* Here he exhorteth all ranks, *first* to good affection, Be strong, or of a good courage; *secondly*, to good action, Work, or be doing; for affection without action is like Rachel, beautiful but barren. Here then, that we falter not, betray not the cause of God, nor come under his heavy displeasure, who equally hateth the timorous and the treacherous, 1. Be armed with true faith. Faith quelleth and killeth distrustful fear. 2. Get the heart fraught with the true fear of God; for as one fire, so one fear, drives out another (Matt. x. 28: 1 Pet. iii. 13, 14). 3. Get and keep a clearing, cheering conscience; for that feareth no colours, as we see in St. Paul, Athanasius, Luther, Latimer, and other holy martyrs and confessors. 4. Think on God's presence as here, Be strong and be doing, for I am with you. Lastly, look up, as St. Stephen did, to the recompense of reward; steal a look from glory, as Moses (Heb. xi. 26); help yourselves over the difficulty of suffering with Christ by considering the happiness of reigning together [*Trapp*].

Ver. 5. *The word that I covenanted.* Deliverance in Egypt should remind of God's power and presence with his

Church. Encouragement is strengthened by reference to the covenant. Former appearances are types of future 1. Providences may seem to contradict promises. 2. Promises never contradict providences. Hence the continual repetition and renewed emphasis of the word.

"Our God is still as kind, and all His gifts
Like wondrous, like unlimited, like fair,
As when the wind first blew. Man is to God
That he hath ever been" [*Bailey*].

HOMILETICS.

The Establishment of God's Kingdom.—*Verses* 6—8.

The Jews are encouraged to proceed with the work by the assurance that Jehovah would, as the governor among the nations, in a brief space, exert his almighty power in effecting a great revolution in the state of the kingdoms of this world, preparatory to the establishment of the kingdom of the Messiah. This mighty change is first described in the usual figurative language of prophecy, as a convulsion of the physical universe, and then literally as a convulsion of all nations. The passage has long been regarded as one of the principal prophecies of the Redeemer's advent [*Henderson*].

I. Revolutions prepare for its establishment. "I will shake the heavens and the earth," &c. 1. *Physical preparations.* The kingdoms of the world are but the scaffolding for the spiritual kingdom, and will be overturned when they have accomplished their end. All earthly mansions are moveable and transitory, subservient to "the kingdom that cannot be moved" (Heb. xii. 26—28). Recognize—(1) *Divine* agency in the world—"*I* will." (2) *Divine order*—"will *shake*." Disturbance before repose, war before peace, is a law in the operations of nature, the government of nations and the history of the Christian Church. In the wars of Alexander the Great and his four successors, in the conquests of Rome, the world was shaken and reduced to order. 2. *Moral preparations.* "I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come." It was an ancient notion that the gods forsook the cities that were taken by the enemy. Hence the power of the gods decayed and national deities were destroyed by the conquests of Roman armies. The nations were thus prepared for the gospel (cf. *Keil* and *Hengs. in loco*). If men did not definitely desire Christ, they were not satisfied with painful rites and bloody sacrifices. They were unsettled, and longed for some one to satisfy their desires. Bewildered by superstitions, they craved for Divine light. And as the time of the Redeemer's advent drew near, there was a general expectation of a deliverer in Jewish and Gentile world. **II. All nations contribute to its establishment.** "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine." According to Josephus, gifts adorned the temple, and dedicatory offerings were presented in it. King Artaxerxes and his counsellors bestowed presents upon Ezra (vii. 15), and the help of Darius Hystaspes (Ezra vi. 6—10) may be regarded as a pledge of the fulfilment of the promise. The riches of kingdoms flowed into the temple. Material wealth will yet be given for the extension and inward growth of God's kingdom. All that is valuable in labour, all that is achieved by intellect, all that is pure and lofty in science, art, and religion, are offerings which the world has brought or will bring into the Church. "The glory and honour of the Gentiles" shall be presented in the courts of Zion (Rev. xxi. 26).

The Desire of all Nations.—*Verse* 7.

This refers unquestionably to the Messiah, yet the title seems to disagree with other parts of Scripture and with fact. He was in the world, and the world knew him not—despised and rejected of men. How then can he be called the Desire of all nations? This character is justified five ways. *First*, by the general expectation

that prevailed in the world previously to his advent. It is well known that there was a looking out for some great deliverer and benefactor nigh at hand. Testimonies from heathen authors have been collected, especially a little poem of Virgil's, written a few years only before the birth of Christ, which contains a prophecy and foreshadows a personage who would restore the peace and plenty of the golden reign. The sentiment was handed down by tradition, but originally derived from a Divine source, the early and repeated promise of "him that should come." *Secondly*, by the need all mankind had of such a Saviour as he would be. Darkness covered the earth. Men knew not the supreme good—found only vanity and vexation of spirit in their pursuits and attainments—had no support in trouble, and their uneasiness arising from guilt, death, and futurity, led them to offer thousands of rams, rivers of oil, and to give their first-born for their transgressions. No remedy could be found to remove doubts and fears. Though they had no revelation of Jesus, who meets their condition, yet they ignorantly groped after what he alone can impart. He therefore deserves to be called the Desire of all nations, just as a physician, able and willing to cure all diseases, is the desire of all patients. *Thirdly*, by being so attractive in himself, that all would actually long after him if they knew him. He has every excellency in person, every perfection in character. Nothing in creation will afford a proper image. All the loveliness of man and angels cannot be compared to his charms. "He is altogether lovely." Do we esteem riches? His are unsearchable. Admire friendship? He sticketh closer than a brother. Applaud benevolence? His love passeth knowledge.

> "His worth if all the nations knew,
> Sure the whole earth would love him too."

Fourthly, by his having had admirers in every country. Wherever believers have been found, they have been distinguished by the same convictions and dispositions with regard to him. Abraham in Canaan rejoiced to see his day. Job in the land of Uz knew that his Redeemer lived. Wise men from Persia paid him homage, and devout men from every nation under heaven joined in the sacrifices and ceremonies of the temple. John heard his praise from an innumerable multitude out of all nations and tongues. *Lastly*, he is so named because in due time he will be prized and gloried in by all the ends of the earth. To him shall the gathering of the people be. He is the salvation prepared for all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles. All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him and call him blessed. How does he appear to me? Is he all my salvation, all my desire? Will it complete my happiness to be like him and see him as he is? [*Jay*].

God's Claims and Man's Stewardship.—*Verse* 8.

In commanding the erection of a glorious house for the Lord to replace the one that had been destroyed, and which then lay waste, a principle is asserted which is unaffected by time or circumstances. God's rights in man and man's possessions may be put among the things which change not.

I. God's claim. God himself makes the announcement. He is jealous for his honour and rights. What he orders to be done, he expects to be done, even if it be difficult to accomplish and involve many sacrifices. 1. *The claim is just.* When God demands the silver and the gold to be devoted to his service, he is not usurping authority that belongs to another. 2. *The claim is absolute.* "Mine" may be written by the finger of God upon all the wealth of the globe (cf. Ps. l. 10, 11, and Isa xl., on God's absolute proprietorship). 3. *The claim is universal.* It was true concerning the exiles returned from long captivity, and it is "the present truth" concerning the possessions of all who are now in the land of the living. II. Man's stewardship. Possessions entrusted to our keeping or use involve us in responsibility. Silver and gold are a trust from God. They may mean so much intelligence,

industry, and self-sacrifice on the part of their temporary owner—but even those mental and moral qualities, which win silver and gold, are enjoyed by God's bounty, and employed by God's providence. "Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth." 1. *Our stewardship ought to be recognized.* We may ignore accountability, but putting it out of mind will not put it out of existence. By considering, laying to heart, we shall escape the wrong and mischief of forgetfulness. 2. *Our stewardship should be thankfully acknowledged.* The inward realization ought to have a glad expression. If the blessing of the Lord makes us rich, he ought to be blessed for his munificent gifts. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me." 3. *Our stewardship should be faithfully discharged.* "It is required in stewards that a man should be found faithful." Diligent employment of possessions, of which silver and gold may stand for symbols, is the condition of their continuance and increase. "For unto every one that hath (or uses what he hath) shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not (or uses not what he hath) shall be taken away that which he hath." Because much silver and gold may not be ours we do not escape the levy of divine law for God's service. "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath," &c. Remember that the eternal rewards are given, not to the conspicuous, famous, or successful servant. The divine commendation of "well done," and the divine dignity and blessedness are bestowed upon "good and faithful servants" [*Mt. Braithwaite*].

The Glory of the Latter House.—*Verse* 9.

The glory of the second temple was not in its outward structure, but its inward furniture. Splendid buildings, painted windows, and stately forms are surpassed by spiritual blessings. There is a "glory that excelleth."

I. In the purity of its worship. In the first house was worldly splendour; in the second, heavenly treasures. In one, dark shadows; in the other, the real substance. There was the ministration of the letter, here of the Spirit. One temple was often polluted with idolatry (2 Kings xxiii. 11, 12), the other is holy in its elements and institutions. Rites and ceremonies gradually retired into the background, prayer and praise took their place. Thus was kept alive a higher and purer type of religion than outward forms and gorgeous ritual. "That which was made glorious, had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth." **II. In the residence of its owner.** God who owned the temple promised to dwell in it. The first glory was covered in the cloud, the second veiled in humanity. The Messiah was "the glory of his people Israel." His presence would be more than a substitute for the distinguished articles wanting. Many eminent persons entered the temple, but he was "greater than the temple." It exists for him, and we must assemble to meet with him. Without him, however splendid, there is no glory; with him, however humble, it becomes "the palace of the great King." "The Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house." **III. In the blessedness of its attendants.** "In this place will I give peace." The Jews had great trouble, but God's presence secured peace and protection. Peace in Christ to the penitent sinner and the doubting Christian is "the glory" of God's house. Peace with men first, and eventually peace on earth. Convulsions in the natural and revolutions in the political world increase "the distress of nations with perplexity" (Lu. xxi. 25—27), and create a longing desire for the Prince of Peace. When he reigns there shall be perpetual peace. Peace from God and based upon his right can never be destroyed. It abounds in depth and duration. "In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth."

"Peace is the end of all things—tearless peace;
Who by the immovable basis of God's throne
Takes her perpetual stand; and of herself
Prophetic, lengthens aye by aye her sceptre" [*Bailey*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 6. The Messiah's kingdom. 1. Introduced by general shaking. 2. Ending in general satisfaction. As the first dispensation was introduced by the shaking of the mount, so the second by the revolutions of nations. These commotions—the presage of God's help and the fulfilment of his promise. "The Desire of all nations shall come."

Vers. 7, 8. Notice—1. The absolute dominion over the world's wealth. 2. The subserviency of this wealth to the promotion of Christ's kingdom. 3. The confidence this should beget in the minds of God's people. "Every penny bears God's superscription as well as Cæsar's" [*Henry*]. The comparative poverty of the Church is not because God cannot bestow riches upon her, but because there are better blessings than wealth that are often incompatible with its possession [*Lange*].

Ver. 9. *Peace.* 1. The blessing bestowed. 2. The source from whence it comes—*I*, saith the Lord of Hosts. 3. The certainty of its possession—"*I will give.*" 4. The place in which it is given—*In this house.* Every house of God is a place where God gives peace, and every place of peace is also a house of God [*Lange*].

On the whole discourse: The glory of God's kingdom. (1) Its conditions—the faithfulness of his people to all their covenant obligations and duties, their obedience, their faith and their courage securing his favour and help. (2) Its nature—the constant reception of increasing multitudes of "Gentiles" with their "treasures" of devotion and service; and the abiding presence of God's Spirit diffusing peace and joy [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

Duty neglected contaminates Character and Conduct.—*Verses* 10—14.

The people suffering from scarcity of food consequent upon the failure of their crops had, it seems, been continuing in some measure their regular sacrificial offerings, though they had been neglecting the building of the temple. These oblations had not been accepted, as they might have inferred from the withdrawal of the divine blessing, the true cause of which is now impressively illustrated. As he who was ceremonially unclean tainted everything with which he came in contact, so had they suffering from God's displeasure, on account of their disregard of his claims, communicated the effects of that displeasure to all the labour of their hands, which profited them nothing [*Lange*]. Attendance upon outward ordinances will not sanctify the character and render those acceptable to God who neglect their duty.

I. This truth is illustrated by divine teaching. "Ask now the priests concerning the law," and it will prove two things. 1. *That sacred things cannot communicate holiness to what they touch.* The flesh of the sacrifice might hallow "the skirt" in which it was carried (Lev. vi. 27), but did not transmit virtue to meat and drink. The altar does not sanctify the gift, nor the temple the land. Corn, wine, and oil are merely common produce. No special blessing rests upon the fruits of the land, on account of its sacredness. 2. *That an unclean person contaminates whatever he touches* (Num. xix. 22). "Legal *sanctity* is not so readily communicated as legal *impurity*. So the paths to sin are manifold; the path to holiness one, and that one of difficult access" [*Grotius*]. Thus prophet and priest act in accordance with their proper functions, and teach the same lessons. One

expounds the law, and the other applies it (Lev. x. 10, 11: cf. Isa. viii. 20). II. This truth is proved in human life. "So is this people, and so is this nation before me." Here the two cases are applied. By the *first* the nation is not made holy by its offerings; by the *second*, by their disobedience, they pollute what they offer. 1. *It is proved in Divine worship.* "And that which they offer there is unclean." Like character, like worship. However splendid the gifts or beautiful the actions in themselves, they will not remove impurity of life through neglect of duty. The possession of sacred privileges will not counterbalance disobedience. 2. *It is proved in daily life.* "So is every work of their hands." Not only in their offering, but also in their *works* are they unclean. Impurity in heart will not sanctify in works. "Those whose devotions are plausible, but whose conversation is wicked, will find their devotions unable to sanctify their enjoyments, and their wickedness prevailing to pollute them." "Unto the pure all things are pure, but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled."

God's Relation to Men determined by their Conduct.—*Verses* 15—19.

The people are bidden to review their condition from the present time to the period preceding the resumption of the temple. The time when the work was resumed is specified here, because it was the turning-point of their fortunes. Their condition before that event is recalled for their contemplation, that it might connect their distress then suffered with their unfaithfulness; and the brief period succeeding their return to obedience is included, because they could not so soon recover from their embarrassments, no harvest having yet intervened [*Lange*].

I. If duty be neglected men are punished. If we repudiate what is due to God, we expose ourselves to danger. Without the controlling influence of duty the wisest and strongest go astray. 1. *They are fruitless in their labour* (ver. 17). "I smote you . . . in all the labours of your hands." To the disease of the corn we have the hail, which smote the vines. The grape for the rich, and the fig for the poor, were smitten by the judgment of God (Ps. lxxviii. 47). 2. *They are disappointed in their hopes* (ver. 16). The heap of sheaves when threshed only yielded half of what they expected. The juice of the grapes gave not the usual measure. God's curses are upon men's labours, if they care not for his work and honour. "The Lord shall smite thee with . . . blasting and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish." II. If duty be performed men are blessed. As the consequence of repentance and obedience the Jews had a prospect of rich and speedy blessings. 1. *Blessed from the day of amendment.* "From this day will I bless you" (ver. 19). God blesses more readily than we think. The day of return to him is the day of rejoicing for us. Temporal blessings shall be followed by spiritual, and we shall prove that "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." 2. *Blessed beyond former abundance.* The vine and olive, which had borne little or nothing, would produce from that day more abundantly. The earth would yield its increase, and God would bless them beyond all probability and degree. Thus do we learn that rewards or chastisements come to man according to his conduct towards God. That natural laws serve for moral discipline, and that whoso is wise will observe these things. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land" (Isa. i. 19: Zech. viii. 9—12).

Consideration of Divine Chastisements

God's dealings may be seen and felt by all, without being understood. Hence men need constantly to be stirred up to consider them. "Now, I pray you to consider from this day."

I. Consider the cause of chastisement. God's anger rested upon them when they neglected their spiritual interests. We assign any cause for sufferings rather than our sins. "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee." **II. Consider the time of chastisement.** 1. The *past.* "From before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord" (ver. 15). 2. The *present.* "From this day." Think of the evils which befell you before you set to work, and remember the blessings promised from the day of its commencement. A true understanding of the past is often the best preparation of the future. **III. Consider the source of chastisement.** "I smote you with blasting" (ver. 17). Men do not recognize Divine agency in the government of the world. The Jews were sensible of their calamities, but did not inquire seriously into the cause of them. Tully thought that God had nothing to do with rain and dew, and ordinary occurrences in life. Science dethrones God, and assigns nature to inflexible laws or infinite power. But all things are upheld by God's power (Heb. i. 3), and made subservient to his purpose. "Fire and hail, snow and vapour, stormy wind fulfilling His word. **IV. Consider the aggravations of chastisement.** "Yet ye turned not to me, saith the Lord" (ver. 17). Affliction will harden the heart if God's purpose be not discovered in it. Impenitence will be a ground of further controversy. The more men revolt, the more will they be smitten (Isa. i. 5). "The people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts."

"Though woo'd and awed,
Bless'd and chastised, a flagrant rebel still!" [*Dr Wardlaw*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 15. *The retrospect.* 1. Its beginning. With the resumption of work. 2. Its direction. "From this day and upward" (*i.e.* backward). Literally, "from the not yet of the laying . . . onwards," *i.e.* onwards from the time when stone was laid upon stone at the temple; in other words, when the building of the temple was resumed, backwards into the past [*Keil*]. 3. Its design. To learn the evils of disobedience, and the blessings of obedience.

Ver. 17. *Divine chastisements.* 1. In their intention to bring back to God. 2. In their results, "yet ye turned not." This result grievous to God, and sorrow to men. "Not being untutored in suffering, I learn to pity those in affliction" [*Virgil*].

Ver. 19. It was winter. No seed in the barn and no signs of a crop, much less of safe ingathering. "Yet from this day will I bless." 1. *God's blessing immediate.* "From this day"—as soon as you return to me and my work. 2. *God's blessing certain.* No visible sign in nature—every appearance against it. But the promise is sure—"infinitely to be preferred even in prospect, to the world's best things in possession" [*Fausset*]. God is so sovereign and absolute a Lord of all things, and hath times and seasons, blessings and cursings, so in his hands, that he may undertake to do things whereof there is no visible probability or certainty in the second causes, and can certainly perform them; therefore doth he undertake to bless them, when second causes and the season could speak no such thing [*Hutcheson*].

HOMILETICS.

THE PRESERVATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE AMID THE OVERTHROW OF EMPIRES.—*Verses* 20—23.

The same day in which God promised the bounties of nature, the prophet received a second message for Zerubbabel, who was concerned for the interests of Zion in predicted revolutions. God would overturn the nations, but preserve his people and their rulers as elect and precious in his sight.

I. Earthly kingdoms will be overthrown. "I will shake the heavens and the earth" (cf. vers. 6, 7). 1. *Overthrown by Divine agency.* "*I* will shake"—"*I* will overthrow," and "*I* will destroy." God is enthroned over all kingdoms, puts down one, and exalts another in his pleasure (Dan. ii. 21: Luke i. 52). 2. *Overthrown by mutual strife.* "Every one by the sword of his brother." Men opposed to God are often opposed to one another. If national truth and righteousness do not control national life, then we may expect self-destruction, if not fratricidal war. Mutual destruction is a feature of Divine judgment upon wicked nations at the end of the world. "Every man's sword shall be against his brother" (Ezek. xxxviii. 8, 9 21: Isa. ix. 19). 3. *Overthrown in military strength.* "The strength of the kingdoms," that which supports them — their chariots and horsemen, and all their military preparations. The kingdoms shall be shaken, thrones upset, and dynasties destroyed. Every people will be shorn of its strength, fall, and cease to be; but the Church of God will be preserved, when unfaithful nations are blotted out of existence. **II. God's people will be protected.** "In that day, saith the Lord of Hosts, will I take thee," to protect and promote thee and thy people to honour. 1. *Certain protection.* The words, "saith the Lord of Hosts," are given three times, for greater assurance and confirmation of faith. 2. *A delightful protection.* "I have chosen thee." God loves his people, and chooses them for himself. He will never cast them off, but make them subjects of his special care. They are a seal upon his heart, a seal upon his arm (Dan. vii. 13); and hidden in the shadow of his hand (Isa. xlix. 2). 3. *An everlasting protection.* As the ring is inseparable from its possessor, so God's people will be permanently connected with him, and become his special inheritance. As royal signets on the eternal hand shall they be safely guarded. They are sealed in Christ, and safe for ever—heirs of that kingdom before which all earthly dominions shall fall. "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful" (Rev. xvii. 14).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 22. The overthrow prophesied is universal. It is not one throne only, as of Persia, but *the throne, i. e.*, the sovereigns *of kingdoms;* not a change of dynasty, but a destruction of their *strength;* not of a few powers only, but *the kingdoms of the heathen;* and that in detail; that in which their chief strength lay, the chariots and horsemen and their riders, and this man by man, *every one by the sword of his brother* [*Pusey*].

Ver. 23. *As a signet.* 1. A token of value. 2. A token of love (Cant. viii. 6). 3. A token of remembrance. This promise is the reverse of Jeconiah's sentence: "though he were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence" (Jer. xxii. 24). "Zerubbabel was a devoted servant of God. God acknowledges his faithfulness. Only the beginning of all was with God. God speaks of the nearness to himself which he had given him. But in two words he cuts off all possible boastfulness of his creature. Zerubbabel was all this, not of himself, but *because God had chosen* him" [*Pusey*]. In his theocratic relation he represented and preserved the kingdom of David. Hence he is regarded by many as a type of Christ, the son of David, and descendant of Zerubbabel (cf. 1 Chr. iii. 19: Matt. i. 12: Luke iii. 27), in whom the kingdom shall be perpetuated. It will be assailed, but never destroyed. All nations that resist shall be broken to pieces, and scattered like chaff before the wind.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1, 2. *Word.* What a beautiful sermon or essay might be written on the growth of prophecy!—from the germ no bigger than a man's hand in Genesis, till the column of cloud gathers size and strength, and height and substance, and

assumes the shape of a perfect man: just like the smoke in the Arabian Night's tale, which comes up and at last takes a genie's shape [*Coleridge*].

Vers. 3—5. *Despondency.* Too often a mischievous gloom enters the mind of God's people. Their hands slacken, their energies are paralyzed for the work of God, and they sink into desponding apathy and indolence Did we realize our present privileges and future prospects, the gleam of sunshine would be to us the earnest of what it will be, when —as Rutherford beautifully observes— "we shall be on the sunny side of the Brae" [*Bridge*].

"There's not a scene on earth so full of lightness,
That withering care
Sleeps not beneath the flowers, and turns their brightness
To dark despair" [*Hon. Mrs Norton*].

Vers. 6—9. *Shake.* The prophet lays stress upon the brevity of the time, for the purpose of comforting. And only what is short in the eyes of men is fitted for this. Even there were forebodings that the time of this empire (Persian) would soon be accomplished, and the rapid conquests of Alexander gave fulfilment to this foreboding. And even his power, which seemed destined to last for ever, very speedily succumbed to the lot of all temporal things. The two most powerful kingdoms that grew out of the monarchy of Alexander, viz. the Syrian and Egyptian, destroyed one another. The Romans now attained to the government of the world; but at the very time when they appeared to be at the summit of their greatness, their shaking had very considerably advanced [*Hengstenberg*].

Ver. 8. *Gold is mine.* Trust Providence for the supply of your wants in the ways of duty and righteousness [*Nicholls*].

Vers. 12—14. *Priests.* The ceremonial institutes of the ancient law were designed to illustrate man's relation to God, as being under his favour or under his displeasure. The conditions and treatment of uncleanness, while setting forth most vividly the loathsomeness and defilement of sin, exhibited as clearly the effects of God's anger against it, which was shown to extend to all the sinner's experience, removing him beyond the reach of covenant mercies and blessings. While the Divine displeasure was manifested towards an individual or a nation, no amount of outward religious observances could appease it, just as no frequency of contact with legally consecrated offerings could impart sacredness to any other object [*Lange*].

Vers. 15—19. *From this day.* Live much in a short time. "Redeem the time," and repair thy omissions in some manner, by redoubling thy diligence. Let the book of thy life, the book that must be opened at the last day, be full of sense and worthy matter: let there be no void spaces and empty gaps (idle words and idle hours are such) in it; let every page of it, every day, be filled with what is significant, intelligible, rational, and worthy to be transcribed and copied out by others [*Dr Worthington*].

Consider. Things are not to be done by the effort of the moment, but by the preparation of past moments [*Cecil*].

Vers. 17—19. *Mildew.* Thorns and thistles were brought forth from the earth as a judgment for disobedience; serpents and savage beasts became evil to man or to each other for the same cause. Every hour reminds us of our fallen condition; but God has so tempered mercy with judgment, that even the natural world calls the sinner to repentance, but not to despair [*Brewer*].

"These worlds had never been, hadst thou in strength
Been less, or less benevolent than strong.
They are thy witnesses, who speak thy power
And goodness infinite" [*Cowper*].

Vers. 21—23. *Overthrow.* In spite of man's short-sighted endeavours to dispose of events according to his own wishes and his own purposes, there is an Intelligence beyond his reason, which holds the scales of justice, and promotes his well-being in spite of his puny efforts [*Morier*]. *Take thee.* The weakest believer is safe, because, by believing, he is within the strongest of all defences. None can pluck him out of the hands of Christ (Prov. xiv. 26). "Let God be thy love and thy fear, and he will be also thy refuge" [*Nicholls*].

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

ZECHARIAH.

INTRODUCTION.

THE WRITER. Our prophet, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was of priestly descent,—a son of *Berechiah*, and grandson of Iddo (ch. i. 1—7), the chief of one of the priestly families that returned from exile along with Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Neh. xii. 4). He followed his grandfather in that office under the high priest Joiakim (Neh. xii. 16), from which it has been justly concluded that he returned from Babylon while still a youth, and that his father died young. This also probably serves to explain the fact that Zechariah is called the son (grandson) of Iddo, in Ezra v. 1, and vi. 14, and that his father is passed over [*Keil*].

THE TIME. We learn from ch. ii. 4, that the prophet was quite a young man when he commenced his labours. In the second year of Darius Hystaspes (B. C. 520), together with Haggai, he sought to stimulate the Jews in rebuilding the temple, which had been suspended from the first year of Cyrus (B. C. 536). Haggai is thought to have commenced two or three months before Zechariah, but Zechariah prophesied for a longer period than that of Haggai. His predictions are a sequel to those of his contemporary, and stretch out in a series of visions from his own days to the first and even the second advent of Christ.

THE BOOK opens with a very simple, touching call to those returned from the captivity, linking himself on to the former prophets, but contrasting the transitoriness of all human things, those who prophesied and those to whom they prophesied, with the abidingness of the word of God [*Pusey*].

1. ITS CONTENTS. There are *four* parts, differing in outward character, yet with a remarkable unity of purpose. All begin with a foreground subsequent to the captivity; all reach on to a further end; the *two first* to the coming of our Lord; the *third*, from the deliverance of the house then built, during the invasion of Alexander, and from the victories of the Maccabees, to the rejection of the true shepherd and the curse upon the false. *The last*, which is connected with the third by its title, reaches from a future repentance for the death of Christ to the final conversion of the Jews and Gentiles [*Pusey*]. Besides the introduction (ch. i. 1—6), we have four longer prophetic announcements: viz. (1) A series of seven

visions which Zechariah saw during the night on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month in the second year of Darius (ch. i. 7; vi. 8), together with a symbolic transaction, which brought the visions to a close (vi. 9—15); (2) the communication to the people of the answer of the Lord to a question addressed to the priests and prophets by certain Judæans as to their continuing any longer to keep the day appointed for commemorating the burning of the temple and Jerusalem by the Chaldæans as a fast-day, which took place in the fourth year of Darius (ch. vii. and viii.); (3) a burden, *i. e.*, a prophecy of threatening import, concerning the land of Hadrach, the seat of the ungodly world-power (ch. ix.—xi.); and (4) a burden concerning Israel (ch. xii.—xiv.) [*Keil*]. The Messianic predictions abound. It has been remarked that Zechariah is distinguished for his insight into the moral and spiritual meaning of the Mosaic economy, and his illustration of the Apostle's statement that the law is a schoolmaster unto Christ, (cf. iii. 8 with vi. 12, 13, xii. 10; xiii. 7.

2. Its Style. In point of style, our prophet varies according to the nature of his subjects and the manner in which they were presented to his mind. He now expresses himself in simple conversational prose, now in poetry. At one time he abounds in the language of symbols; at another, in that of direct prophetical announcement. His symbols are, for the most part, enigmatical, and require the explanations which accompany them. His prose resembles most that of Ezekiel; it is diffuse, uniform, and repetitious. His prophetic poetry possesses much of the elevation and dignity to be found in the earlier prophets, with whose writings he appears to have been familiar; only his rhythm is sometimes harsh and unequal, while his parallelisms are destitute of that symmetry and finish which form some of the principal beauties of Hebrew poetry [*Henderson*].

The Hebrew is considered pure and free from Chaldæisms. Some forms are peculiar, but on the whole the language corresponds to the earlier forms, and exhibits few traces of decay. "The prophet, who returned as a child to Judæa, formed his language upon that of the older prophets" [*Pusey*]. Hengstenberg suggests two considerations which aid the interpreter. One, that Zechariah leans much upon his predecessors prior to the Captivity; hence much light is gained from parallel passages. The other, that being a prophet of the Restoration, one element of uncertainty which is found in the earlier prophets here ceases. "The beautiful harmonies of Zechariah's prophecies are awakened by the breath of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel, as by a heavenly breeze stirring and attuning the golden strings of a Divine harp. The one is adjusted to the other. The one proves the Divine origin of the other" [*Wordsworth*].

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **2. Sore**] Lit. displeased with displeasure, wrath not common, whose greatness is given as a ground for their return. **3. Therefore**] Lit. and thou sayest, or must say. **Return**] (cf. Mal. iii. 7: Jas. iv. 8) Amendment of life and return to work not enough; conversion must be thorough. The threefold "thus saith the Lord," shows the importance of the admonition, and indicates the boundless power of God. **4. Fathers**] Warning to shun the example of their predecessors, who were disobedient. **Former prophets**] before captivity. **5. Fathers**] have perished; their fate should warn you. But you may object, the **prophets** also are dead, and apparently their words died with them. **6.**] No; the threatenings **take hold**; overtake them as one flying from the foe. The words and statutes (decrees) of God uttered by the prophets reached them like arrows shot forth, and fulfilled threatened punishment (cf. Deut. xxviii. 15—45). **Thought**] Decreed to do (Lam. ii. 17). **7.**] The general plan of the nine following visions (ch. i. 8 to end of ch. vi.) is first to present the *symbol*; then, on a question being put, to subjoin *the interpretation*. Though the visions are distinct, they form one grand whole, presented in one night to the prophet's mind, two or three months after the prophet's first commission [*Fausset*]. **8—17.**] *Vision first.* **A man**] *i. e.* an angel in the shape of a man (vers. 11, 12). **Riding**] Swift in execution and help; leader of those who follow, and to whom they report. **Red**] Colour of blood; vengeance to be inflicted upon the foes of Israel (cf. 2 Kings iii. 22: Isa. lxiii. 1, 2: Rev. vi. 4). **Myrtle trees**] Symbol of Israel; not a stately forest, but a low shrub, fragrant in smell and beautiful in leaf. **8. Behind**] horses. **Red, speckled** (bay), and **white**] the symbol of victory. These are agencies employed by God, and the colour may indicate the nature of their mission [cf. *Lange*]. **9. My lord**] The one who answers the prophet, the *angelus interpres*, whose sole function was to enlighten the prophet, and cause him to understand the vision. **10.**] The angel of Jehovah replies, and not the interpreting angel. **11.**] The riders themselves then state the result of their mission. **Walked**] with unceasing activity (cf. Job i. 7) in God's errands. **Still**] Hindrances to restoration removed. Persian wars had ceased, and at that time (ver. 1) universal peace reigned over the earth; *tranquil* (Jud. v. 26). This statement of peace contrasts with the prostrate condition of Israel, and gives occasion for intercession. **12. How?**] Intercession. **70 years**] does not imply that the period predicted (Jer. xxv. 12) was just closing, for it had already expired in the first year of Cyrus (Ezra i. 1). But the people were in a sad state; though restored, the capital in ruins (Neh. i. 3) and the work hindered. **13.**] *Jehovah*, the angel of ver. 12. **Words**] which promise good, *i. e.* salvation (cf. Josh. xxiii. 14: Jer. xxix. 10). "In vers. 14—17, the first two of which assert Jehovah's active affection for his people, and the latter two his purpose to manifest that love in the restoration and enlargement of Jerusalem" [*Lange*]. **Jealous**] for Jerusalem, which is wantonly injured. **Displeased**] with nations careless and secure, confident in their own strength and prosperity. To Israel anger was only a tittle; to the heathen it was fatal. **16. Returned**] to Jerusalem, from whom God had withdrawn. **Line**] All obstacles removed, the temple completed, and the whole city shall be regular in shape, and exact in its survey. **17. Cities**] Other cities of Judah belong to God, will prosper and **spread**] Lit. scattered not by an invading foe, but by growth and abundance (cf. ii. 4; viii. 4). **18—21.**] **Four horns**] The second vision. The foes of the Jews will be destroyed. **Scattered**] The people of God surrounded by enemies on all sides. The number **four** referred to the four quarters of the earth in relation to Palestine [cf. *Hend*]; by others, to four chief nations. **20. Carpenters**] Artificers for each horn, indicating the agencies God employs for the destruction of those hostile to his people; "skilful to destroy" (Ezek. xxi. 36). **Lifted up**] Depressed with suffering and **fear** (Job x. 15). **Fray**] Terrify and scatter them in their pride and tyranny (Ezek. xxx. 9: Ps. lxxv. 4, 5.

HOMILETICS.

THE PROPHET'S COMMISSION.—*Verses* 1—3.

Zechariah was sent to console and encourage God's people in distress. But the ground must be prepared Law before gospel, repentance before blessing. Hence in the first words we have the key-note to his message, and the introduction to his labours. In the prophet's commission we have—

I. **Its Divine origin.** "The word of the Lord came to him"—his call was Divine not human, real not fanciful; a token of God's great work among his people, and a guarantee that it would be successfully carried on. II. Its solemn nature.

"Therefore, say unto them," that God was angry with their fathers, and will be with them if they repent not. The first message is one of warning and judgment. He has to set forth the justice and assert the prerogative of God in the government of the world. Men consider Divine displeasure to be an unreasonable disturbance of their ease, and an impeachment upon the Divine character. But God's anger is real and terrible. It is visible in providence and in nature. "Wrath and threatening are invariably mingled with love; and in the utmost solitudes of nature, the existence of hell seems to me as legibly declared by a thousand spiritual utterances as of heaven" [*Ruskin*]. Persistent attempts are made to deny and evade this fact. Sin blinds men, and makes them transfer their own views to God. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee" (Ps. l. 21). **III. Its inward pressure.** The words in ver. 2 were delivered to the prophet, and contain the reason for the summons to the people in ver. 3. "They disclose to us the internal pressure under which he entered upon his office. A due sense of the power of God's wrath lies at the basis of all true earnestness on the part of his prophets. It is the 'burning fire shut up in the bones' (Jer. xx. 9), which imparts its own vehemence to the message, and produces corresponding conviction in them that hear. We observe it in the Prophet of all prophets, the Saviour himself. His groaning in spirit at the grave of Lazarus, his tears over Jerusalem, show how deeply he felt the terribleness of God's anger" [*Lange*]. There is a great demand now for honest, enlightened, and seasonable speech in the Christian ministry. "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts iv. 20: Job xxxii. 18—20: Acts xviii. 5).

THE CALL TO REPENTANCE.—*Verses* 3, 4.

Like John the Baptist, Zechariah begins his preaching with a call to repentance, and warns the people, by the history of their fathers, that no spiritual privileges will profit them without holiness, but rather will aggravate their guilt and increase their condemnation if they disobey God. He declares to them that no outward profession of religion will avail; that all notions of self-righteousness are offensive to God; and that what he looks for is personal holiness, and a practical discharge of the duties of piety and mercy [*Wordsworth*].

I. They had need to repent. "Therefore, say unto them, Turn ye." 1. *Their return was defective.* God had delivered them from captivity, and stirred them to work; but zeal without real conversion will soon die out. We must give our whole heart to God, leave self-interest behind, and seek nearer access. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." 2. *Their delay would be dangerous.* (1) *Disobedience would be imitation of their fathers.* "Be ye not as your fathers." Precedents have great influence. Men decry good, but follow evil customs. The sin of Jeroboam was held sacred by his successors. But we should be warned by the sins, and deterred by the punishment, of our fathers. "They did not hear nor hearken unto me." (2) *Disobedience would bring God's displeasure upon them.* God was sore displeased with their fathers, and would be with them if they refused to turn. Heavier scourges were ready, and symptoms of displeasure already appeared in "sowing much" to "bring in little" (Hag. i. 6). God's dealings with the past are designed to instruct the present generation. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples (types): and they are written for our admonition (instruction)" (1 Cor. x. 11). **II. They had encouragement to repent.** "And I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts." This promise was a motive and a help to them. The duty would be difficult, if not impossible, but for this encouragement. God is always found of those who seek him. If we desire God to turn to us, we must return to him. The flower turned from the sun can never catch its genial rays. 1. *The promise is necessary.* We require something positive. "We are saved by hope." The beginning of religious life and duty is often a kind of venture. Hence

failure and turning back. 2. *The promise is certain.* We have not mere possibility or probability, but certainty; assurance which cannot deceive. "I will." 3. *The promise is confirmed.* Israel returned to God, and he returned to them. Manasseh sought the Lord and found him. The prodigal went home and was received "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord" (Jer. iii. 12: Mal. iii. 7: Ezek. xviii. 30).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 4. 1. *The advantages of their fathers.* "The former prophets" enforced the law, and proclaimed the word of God; exhorted to repentance; and predicted Divine judgments. 2. *The guilt of their fathers.* "But they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord." Their guilt aggravated by their privileges. "Unto *me*." God was in the voice of prophets, but was despised. "He that receiveth you, receiveth me." "We learn here that the examples set up as a a shield for wrong-doing are so far from becoming of any weight before God that they enhance our guilt. Yet this folly infatuates many, for the Papists claim their religion to be holy and irreprehensible because it has been handed down by their fathers" [*Calvin*]. Ancient example and long usage will not justify disobedience (2 Chr. xxvi. 15, 16) [*Fausset*].

No mercy without return, and no return without mercy. Haste that you may not be overtaken. 1. Haste, for your day of grace is short, and even the messengers of grace are passing away. 2. If once you are overtaken, your eyes will open too late, and only with trembling lips can you give honour to the Lord [*Lange*]. *Evil ways.* The ways and works of the earlier generations are called *evil;* in the first instance, because they were morally corrupt, and also because they were followed by sore consequences [*Lange*].

Vers. 3, 4. 1. *Sin creates distance from God.* The sinner is alienated in heart, and turned back from God in his works and pursuits. 2. *Repentance is a full return to God.* Not partial amendment, but entire renunciation of sin, and coming close up to God in reconciliation and fellowship. 3. *God calls men to this repentance.* "Say unto them." His voice is heard in the ministry. His judgments rightly studied declare his will, and are often suspended till we return. But some return, and others do not.

HOMILETICS.

Lessons from the Lives of the Fathers.—*Verses* 5, 6.

The two questions in ver. 5 are meant as denials, and are intended to anticipate the objection which the people might have raised to the admonitions in ver. 4, to the effect, that not only the fathers, but also the earlier prophets, had died long ago; and therefore an allusion to things that had long since passed by could have no force at all for the present generation. Zechariah neutralizes this objection by saying: Your fathers have indeed been long dead, and even the prophets do not, or cannot, live for ever; but notwithstanding this, the words of the earlier prophets were fulfilled in the case of the fathers. The words and decrees of God uttered by the prophets reached them, and they were obliged to confess that God had really done to them what he threatened [*Keil*]. We have—

I. A motive to activity. Your fathers and the prophets who taught them are dead. No man lives for ever. Others have worked and lived where we dwell; but ministers, teachers, and parents are gone, and their hearers after them. Our course will be finished soon. Hence this is *our* day of service. It becomes *us* to redeem the time, to be active and diligent in serving God ourselves, and urging others to

serve him. **II. A testimony to the truth of God's word.** Your fathers are not here, but we have their testimony. My words took hold upon them, and they confessed their power in twofold experience. "According to our ways and according to our doings." If they rebelled they felt the threatening, and if they returned the promise was fulfilled. God's providence ensures the accomplishment of his word, and compels the acknowledgment of that accomplishment from those who feel it. God is faithful and unchangeable in his purpose. "The word of the Lord endureth for ever." **III. A warning against apostasy.** The fate which overtook the fathers is pointed out as a warning to them." "Where are they?" They are dead; but did they escape the punishment due to their sins? No; in mournful confessions we have acknowledgments of the fact. There may be delay, and the sinner may think that he will escape; but sooner or later the word will catch him, stick in his heart like an arrow from the Almighty. The transgressor will be made to confess, "Mine iniquities have overtaken me."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 6. I. *The message of God proclaimed by his servants.* Unchangeable in its nature. "My words and statutes," *i. e.* decrees, given with Divine authority; "which I commanded." II. *Men trying to escape from this message.* The words took hold, *i. e. overtook* them, when fleeing from them in hatred and rebellion. III. *The humble confession of men when caught by the word.* "Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us," &c. They have to confess the truth of God, and expose their folly when it is too late. Men should be wise in time. "The Lord is righteous, for we have rebelled against his commandments."

According to our ways. An acknowledgment—1. Of the truth of God. 2. The desert of sin; and 3. The certainty of retribution. Sin sweet in taste, but bitter in fruits. Lessons:—1. Consider the warnings of God. 2. Recognize the hand of God in the punishment of men. "'Like as the Lord of hosts,' whose power is irresistible, 'thought' (devised, determined with himself, and accordingly denounced by the prophets) 'to do unto us,' who did not the words which he commanded us (Jer. xi. 8), 'according to our ways,' which were always grievous (Ps. x. 5), 'and according to our doings,' that were not good (Ezek. xxxvi. 31), 'so hath he dealt with us;' for he loves to retaliate, and to render to every transgression and disobedience a just recompence of reward (Heb. ii. 2)." [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

The Man among the Myrtles, or the Divine Protection of the Church. *Verses* 8—13.

The prophet received his visions not in a dream, but when spiritually conscious; at *night*, when most still and free from worldly cares, and most susceptible for Divine communications. In this first vision we have the protection of the Church of God in its weak and dangerous condition.

I. **Jesus Christ is in her midst.** "Behold, a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom." The presence of a great personage should give confidence. "Fear not, thou carriest Cæsar." But "God is in the midst of" the Church; "she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early." 1. *Standing to defend her.* "He stood" as in his own residence (Ps. cxxxii. 14). 2. *Riding to help her.* Riding in speed, upon a red horse, to inflict vengeance upon her foes (cf. 2 Kings iii. 22: Isa. lxiii. 1, 2: Rev. vi. 4). 3. *Interceding on her behalf.* "O Lord of hosts," &c. (ver. 12). He was deeply touched with the report given, and with the contrast between the condition of the heathen at ease and that of the Church in desolation. Hence he prays (*a.*) *for*

mercy. "Wilt thou not have mercy upon Jerusalem?" (*b.*) *For a full display of mercy.* The work, long delayed, had only just begun. Much more remained to be done for the city, the country, and the people. As God had executed the threatening, so a fulfilment of the promise is desired. **II. Angels are employed on her behalf.** "What are these? . . . These are they whom the Lord hath sent to and fro through the earth. We have a craving for the knowledge of creatures above ourselves. No system of religion separates the seen from the unseen world. Hence all the various doctrines and theories of angels. In Scripture alone is our natural longing satisfied. We learn that God is pleased to use the agency of supernatural beings; that these heavenly watchmen continually walk about Zion, or visit distant parts of the universe, to counteract the work of Satan (cf. ii. 11: Job i. 7), to guard his people, and minister to the heirs of salvation (Heb. i. 14). Consider—1. *Their number;* 2. *Their work;* and 3. *Their obedience.* Why despair, like the servant of Elisha? Angels are sent to help when God is pleased with us. "Behold, the mountain was full of horses, and chariots of fire round about."

> "They fight for us, they watch and duly ward,
> And their bright squadrons round about us plant;
> And all for love, and nothing for reward,
> Oh! why should heavenly God to man have such regard" [*Spenser*].

III. God's providence defends her. Most commentators take the troop and the colour of these horses as symbolic of the dispensations of Divine providence. Observe—1. *The nature of Providence.* "The peculiar nature of the dispensations is indicated by the colour of the horses, and the armour and appearance of the riders" [*Hend.*]. The *red* horse to-day in conflict and suffering; soon will the Divine Leader ride in triumph on the *white* horse. 2. *The order of Providence.* Red horses "first," speckled and white follow. Without pressing the point too far, we see wars, famines, and pestilence end in victory. Most wonderfully did God prepare political events, in the restoration from Babylon and in the coming of Christ, for the special condition of his Church. Quietness may reign in all quarters except in the Church. Divine justice may seem to sleep; but it is only the calm before the storm. Amid sufferings and perplexing providences, believers may cry, "How long?" But the uncreated angel intercedes; "comfortable words" shall be heard, and the darkness of the night shall be forgotten in the glory of the day. "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 8. *The myrtle trees in the bottom,* from their fragrance and lowness, probably symbolize the Church, as at once yielding a sweet odour, and in a low estate or lowly. The natural habits of the myrtle make it the fitter emblem [*Pusey*]. The Church of God is *hidden,* secreted as unobserved in a valley. There is the idea of *tranquil security;* the myrtle grove in the valley is calm and still, while the storm sweeps over the mountain summits. In the metaphor we have *perpetual growth.* The myrtle is always green, sheds not her leaves. The Church has ever a *verdure* of grace, sometimes *most* verdure when winter is sharpest. Here we have the emblem of peace, and a significant token of *victory* (*Spurgeon*).

HOMILETICS.

COMFORTABLE WORDS.—*Verses* 13—17.

Jehovah replied to the intercession of the angel that he loved Jerusalem, and that this love would be displayed in securing its good. If we wait patiently, and commit

our trouble to our Intercessor, we shall have "good words" for ourselves, and "comfortable" words for others.

I. God's love in its objects. He was jealous for his people, and angry with their enemies. 1. *He loved Jerusalem.* The city had been wronged by others. His honour was involved in its insults. He was zealous for her interests, zealous, "with a great jealousy," for her good. He had been ill-requited for kindness—had chastised them for deserts—but his love changed not. In the past and in the present he was "a jealous God" (Ex. xxxiv. 14). 2. *He was displeased with their enemies.* "I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease." He was "but a little displeased," when he gave them permission to chastise his people. But they afflicted them more than he desired, and sought their extinction to gratify lust and revenge. "They helped forward the affliction." God's displeasure is temporary and for good; men's displeasure is lasting and cruel. **II. God's love in its consequences.** "Therefore, thus saith the Lord," &c. (ver. 16). Judgments were designed to restore them to God—that *he* might return in mercy to them. God hides his face and we are troubled (Ps. xxx. 7); he returns and we rejoice. We have mercy instead of wrath—*mercies* repeated and manifold. "I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies." 1. *The capital shall be built.* All hindrances shall be removed, and instead of scattered houses, the whole city shall be measured in order and regularity. "A line shall be stretched forth over Jerusalem." 2. *The temple shall be restored.* "My house shall be built in it." The worship of God should be the concern of men. Cities without churches are cities without ornaments. The palace of the prince must never take the place of the temple of God. 3. *The country shall flourish.* "Cry yet," in addition to foregoing promises, "my cities shall overflow with prosperity." Not only Jerusalem, but subordinate cities of Judah, shall have abundance of outward and spiritual increase. The produce of the vintage and the fruits of the earth; an extension of trade and an increase of population, shall be given. Whatever be the immediate prospects of the Church, God has great consolation for her. He will yet prosper and comfort Zion. The completion of the temple, the restoration of the city, and the increase of the people, are a declaration of his love, a manifestation of his purpose, and a pledge of his fidelity. "The Lord shall comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord."

The Four Horns and the Four Smiths, or the Danger and the Defence of the Church.—*Verses* 18—21.

This second vision is a fulfilment of the foregoing promise. The *horn* is an emblem of power. The four mentioned indicate hostile powers on every side, which seek to oppress and crush the people of God. The four smiths signify antagonistic forces which God has raised up and commissioned to destroy. Learn—

I. The Church of Christ exists in the midst of conflict. "These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." The Jews, in every age, were opposed by enemies. In Apostolic and succeeding times, the Christian Church had to contend with powers and principalities—persecutions strong and violent. In every quarter of the earth the people of God have been in danger, have had to endure wrath, conflict, and death. Fiery trials await them everywhere. They are left to be tossed by the horns of the enemies, apparently defenceless, though loyal subjects of him who has all power in heaven and earth. It is God's will that they should struggle and conquer in conflict with evil. **II. In this conflict God raises up men.** Enemies and difficulties may surround the Church, but God provides help, and opens our eyes to discern it. "The Lord showed me four (carpenters) smiths." 1. *Men qualified in strength.* Workmen are needed. Men of iron hand and resolute will. Smiths who can wield the hammer and smash the horns in pieces.

Right kind of men are often wanting. Jeremiah searched in vain (ch. iv. 22—25; v. 1), and another cries with a similar result: "I sought for a *man* among them, that should make up the hedge and stand in the gap before me, for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none" (Ezek. xxii. 30). 2. *Men sufficient in number.* For every horn there was a smith to fray or destroy it. Strange that a kind of equilibrium between assault and defence should be maintained. But this is no ground for despair. The agencies to foil are as numerous as the enemies themselves. For every evil there is a remedy, and for every danger a deliverer. The horn may do its work, but the smith will follow to take vengeance. **III. Men of the right kind are raised up at the right time.** The prophet saw the horns first, but had not long to wait for the carpenters. Just when they were required they came ready for work. Men will be called and qualified when God has a work for them to do. They may be in the hut of the peasant or in the school of the prophet, preparing for the contest. Moses and Joshua, Paul and Luther, Knox and Whitfield, were raised up at the right time. Have confidence then. A providence silent and unseen works on and prepares the way. Where God has a people, there he is to defend and prosper them. Rutherford wrote to a little church in Scotland, harassed and ready to despair on account of persecution: "So long as there is any of the Lord's lost money in your town, he won't put out the candle."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 15. *God's displeasure.* 1. Towards his people only short. "A little displeased." "Little," says Pusey, "in comparison with our deserts; little, in comparison with the anger of the human instruments of his displeasure; little, in comparison with their's who, in their anger, sought their own ends." 2. Towards his enemies very great. "I am very sore displeased with the heathen." At ease themselves they persecute others. Though permitted to correct God's people, they often with revengeful malice exceed their commission, and thus bring mischief upon themselves (Prov. xxiv. 17, 18). The chastisement of believers is temporary, and in love; the punishment of the wicked will be in anger, and for ever. "God uses not the rod where he means to use the sword," says Bishop Hall.

Vers. 16, 17. 1. The *nature* of the mercies. The rebuilding of the temple—restoration of public worship—rebuilding of the metropolis, and increase of the cities. 2. The *source* of the mercies. "Thus saith the Lord, *I* am returned." "Thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve" (Ezra ix. 13: Lam. iii. 22). 3. The *measure* of the mercies. In ver. 17 there are four *yets*, and all very gracious ones; to break their hard hearts and to raise their faith on his promised mercies. You shall have plentiful increase of men, cattle, and all manner of fruits of the earth, so that it shall no more be said, This is Zion whom no man careth for (Jer. xxx. 17); yea, you shall have a fulness of all things, not only repletive, but diffusive, not only of abundance but of redundance too; your cup shall overflow into the lesser vessels of others [cf. *Trapp*].

> "Surer to prosper than prosperity
> Could have assured us" [*Milton*].

Vers. 18—21. We learn from these verses that the friends of Zion are numerous as her foes; that her defence is equal to her danger; that as the state of his people requires it, the Lord will seasonably raise up means and instruments for their succour and deliverance. The assurance may be derived from four principles: the love of God—the power of God—the faithfulness of God—the conduct of God. In the first, we see that he may be inclined to appear for them, as they are infinitely dear to him. In the second, we see that he is able to save them. In the third, that he is engaged to do it. In the fourth, that he always has done it. Scripture, history, and experience, being witness—

> "Then let the world forbear their rage,
> The Church renounce her fear;
> Israel must live through every age,
> And be the Almighty's care" [*Jay*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Vers. 2, 3. *Turn.* Let every man that would avoid a return to his former iniquity, be infinitely careful to avoid every new sin, for it is like a blow to a broken leg, or a burden to a crushed arm. Every little thing disorders the new health and unfinished recovery. [*J. Taylor.*]

Ver. 5. *Your fathers.* While we shrink with self-diffident dread from the thought of apostasy from Christ and from God, let us see to it that in our different conditions and relations in life —in the family, in the church, in general society — we be found filling up our fleeting day of life with increasingly active devotedness, "not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," that so, when it shall, in our turn, come to be said of us, "*Where are they?*" the recollection of our lives by those who survive us may not be an entire blank [*Wardlaw*].

Ver. 6. *Overtake.* Heathen reminiscence of God's justice acknowledged. "Rarely hath punishment with limping tread part with the forerunning miscreant" (cf. Hor. Od. iii. 9) [*Pusey*].

Vers. 8—11. *Angels.* Angels are men of a superior kind [*Young*]. They bear his will about to every part of the universe. This is their delight. They bless God, who vouchsafes thus to employ them. But when they have fulfilled God's message, then they return back to him by whom they were sent forth, and stand before him, drinking in fresh streams of life and strength and purity and joy from his presence [*Hare*].

Ver. 11. Their office was not a specific or passing duty, as when God sent his angels with some special commission, such as those recorded in Holy Scripture. It was a continuous conversation with the affairs of men, a minute course of visiting, inspecting our human deeds and ways, and a part of the "wonderful order" in which God has "ordained and constituted the service of angels and men" [*Pusey*].

Vers. 12, 13. That same Christ, who is on earth in spirit on the red horse, is in heaven in person, pleading before the throne. He pleads—he pleads for *mercy.* Mercy that sent him to earth; mercy is his petition now. He pleads for *present mercy.* His cry is, "How long?" Eighteen hundred years is it since my blood was offered, and yet my kingdom has not come. Observe the objects of his intercession; he pleads for Jerusalem and Judah. "I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me." And must he not prevail? Church of God, if thou canst be rejected, yet *he* cannot be. No! in the name of him who loves, and lives, and pleads before the eternal throne, let us set up our banner; for God has given the victory into our hands in answer to the pleadings of his Son [*Spurgeon*].

Vers. 18—20. *Fray.* The Church may rest calmly in the assurance that every hostile power shall be judged and destroyed. The primary reference was to the Jews in restoring the city and completing the temple. But it has a wider significance. In the long history of the Church, it is proved that "no weapon formed against her shall prosper" [cf. *Lange*]. God directs and overrules all counsels and events for the progress and ultimate triumph of his kingdom.

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **The third vision. Man**] Messiah, who **measures and will restore the city. 2. Measure**] To sketch a plan for its arrangement and rebuilding, denoting exactness of proportions and completeness of number (Rev. ii. 1; xxi. 15, 16). **4. Run**] Necessity of despatch. **Young man**] Zechariah young in service or in age, probably between 20 and 30 years old **Jerusalem**] to have vast influx of men and cattle, no longer to be confined in narrow walls and fixed limits, but spread out like the open country (Isa. xlix. 19, 20: Ezek. xxxviii. 11). **5. Wall**] Protection, in allusion to nightly encampments, when fires were kindled to keep off wild beasts. **Glory**] Illustrious displays of God's presence; an allusion to the Divine presence in the Holiest (Rom. ix. 4). **6. North**] Babylon, north of Jerusalem; an address to such Jews as still remained there, through infirmity, ties of property, &c. The urgency of the call denoted by repetition, **Ho, ho! Spread**] Scattered in violence. **7. Zion**] *i. e.* inhabitants of Zion; God's people dwelling with the **daughter**, *i. e.* the people, of Babylon, personified as a woman (Ps. ix. 14; cxxxviii). **8, 9, After**] obtaining glory (ver. 5), the speaker is sent to inflict vengeance upon the enemies. "To get glory upon the heathen, *i. e.* to display the glory of God upon the heathen through the judgment by which their power is broken, and the heathen world is made to serve the people of God" [*Keil*]. **9. For**] An additional explanation. The angel of the Lord would swing (**shake**) his hand, as a gesture of menace or symbol of miraculous power (cf. Isa. xi. 15; xix. 16) over the nations. As a consequence they would be a spoil to the Jews who had been obliged to serve them. **Know**] here, and in ver. 11, signifies as frequently, to *know* by *experience* [*Henderson*]. **10.**] Summons to rejoice over God's indwelling, and its happy results. **Come**] at Messiah's first advent, and more especially in his return in glory (Jer. i. 14, and Rev. xxi. 3). **11.**] Then many nations will be **joined**; attach themselves to Jehovah, and become his people (cf. chap. viii. 20, 21: Isa. xiv. 1). The restricted kingdom of Israel will be enlarged and glorified. **10, 11.**] (Heb. xiv. 15). The Divine residence here predicted must be interpreted of that which took place during the sojourn of the Son of God in the land of Judea. The almost entire identity of the language here employed with that used in chap. ix. 9, where, in like manner, the daughter of Zion is called to hail the advent of her king, compels to this conclusion (cf. Ps. xl. 7: Isa. xl. 9, 10). With this appearance and residence of the Messiah are connected, as their consequents, the extensive conversion of the heathen nations, and their being constituted a people devoted to his service and glory. The repetition of the prediction relative to his residence in Zion is designed to express the certainty of the event [*Henderson*]. **12. Inherit**] Will **take possession of Judah**, according to Deut. xxxii. 9; they would become the objects of God's **favour and delight. 13. Silent**] All flesh summoned to wait in reverence and submission to Jehovah coming to work. **Already he has risen up**] out of heaven his holy habitation (Deut. xxvi. 15: 2 Chron. xxx. 27), to avenge his people. "The Divine majesty has seemed to be asleep, but now it is roused up; let men therefore beware" [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

THE MEASURED CITY.—*Verses* 1—5.

The third vision continues the subject of the second—the rebuilding of the city and temple of Jerusalem. The one represents the destruction of Israel's foes, the other the increase and security of the covenant nation. The prophet sees a man with a measuring-line advancing on the scene, and asks the meaning. The answer is given, that Jerusalem is about to be measured, with a view to future glory and extension.

I. The city accurately measured. "To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof." When a house or city is built or enlarged a survey is made. When Constantine resolved to erect a metropolis for his mighty empire, he set out on foot, at the head of a procession, to trace its boundary. His attendants expressed astonishment at the breadth of the circuit he was taking. "I shall still advance, till he, my Invisible Guide, thinks proper to stop," was the reply. He halted not till wide over seven hills the limits were fixed. Then millions from all parts of his dominions set to work with wonderful success. The

Church has an architect,—"whose builder and maker is God." Before a stone was laid, the dimensions were taken, and the plan formed. If men form plans before they build, shall not God? In creation we have order and measurement, in providence purpose and gradual fulfilment. God knows the number and condition of the Christian Church—the true and the false professors. On earth and in heaven this city is defined in its proportions, and exact in its size (Rev. ii. 1; xxi. 15, 16). **II. The city greatly enlarged.** "Jerusalem was to be inhabited as towns without walls." The former limits of the city would be too narrow. The inhabitants shall become so many that they shall spread out and dwell securely in the open country. Earthly walls may defend but they limit and straiten a city. Barriers will be removed, and the boundaries of the Church shall extend far and wide. *Literally*, this was verified. Josephus and others tell us that the citizens "gradually crept out beyond its walls," and grew "to a number which the city in its ancient dimensions could not supply with dwellings." *Spiritually*, the Mosaic walls were thrown down, and the limits of the Church extended to others far beyond the Jewish nation. Now the "line" of the gospel "is gone out through all the earth." There is yet room for "every kindred and people and nation and tongue." Of the increase of this city there will be no end. Its inhabitants at length will be "a multitude which no man can number." **III. The city Divinely protected.** "The Lord will be unto her a wall of fire round about," &c. No danger will happen to the unwalled city. God would encamp round it, a wall of fire, to consume every foe that invades it. Moats may be crossed, massive walls may be assailed, and mighty ramparts be overturned; but a circle of flame is an impassable barrier. The walls of Babylon were levelled to the ground, the hills round Jerusalem were scaled, and proud cities have been destroyed; but God is the defence without and the glory within the Church. It is a strong city, and God has appointed salvation for walls and bulwarks (Isa. xxvi. 1). "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from henceforth even for ever."

In vers. 4 and 5, three things are promised respecting the literal Jerusalem.

I. Extension. Notice the correspondence between ver. 4 and the representation in the first vision (chap. i. 16, 17). The expression, "shall be inhabited without walls" (or as a modern translator gives, "as unwalled villages"), has a meaning sufficiently obvious; viz. that the former limits of the city which "the man with the measuring-line" was about to take, would be too straitened for the number of its inhabitants; so that they would spread themselves out into surrounding localities. This was literally fulfilled. For a time immediately after the return from Babylon, under Nehemiah, the building and extension were rapid. The progress suffered interruption—adverse and prosperous seasons,—opposition and favour; till, in the period of the heroic Maccabees, "Jerusalem, blessed with freedom and prosperity, filled the extent of her walls with citizens, resumed her royal insignia under native princes, overpassed her former boundaries,—and, as the head of a populous and extensive territory, rose to a state of opulence, power, dignity, and splendour which she had not known since the division of Israel and Judah" [*Stonard*]. **II. Security.** This is implied, to a certain extent, in the former particular. The very idea of dwelling "*without walls*" implies *confidence* or felt safety. But mark the striking promise (ver. 5). The figure is most vivid and expressive. As a literal "wall of fire," environing a city, would effectually prevent intrusion by consuming all who should venture to attempt it; so would Jehovah's avenging jealousy destroy every assailant of the holy city. He himself would be its unseen but sure protection. Had the inhabitants—Israel and Judah generally—in former days exercised faith in God, walked in his fear, maintained the purity of his worship, and the practice of his laws, its walls had never been overthrown, nor its temple demolished; it would have been as safe without walls as with them; it would never have experienced its seventy years' desolation, nor its people the same

period of captivity and oppression. Now he had begun their promised restoration, and engages to invest their city anew with his all-protecting presence and power. The figure resembles the vision in 2 Kings vi. 15—17. **III. Glory.** "The glory in the midst of her." Jehovah's presence, "dwelling between the cherubim," was from the beginning and all along the true glory of ancient Jerusalem. Its *Shekinah* was glorious; but this was only the visible symbol of an infinitely more glorious presence. The Jews counted the fire, and the temple, the ark, the altar, and the pomp of ritual their glory. But these external glories did nothing for them. When by their sins they drove Jehovah from them their true glory departed. When he took up anew his abode with them—*that* would be their glory. *He* would also be glorified in delivering them from thraldom, protecting them in danger, receiving their homage, vindicating their rights, and avenging their wrongs [*Wardlaw* condensed].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 1—5. I believe this passage refers to a happy and glorious future, yet to come, when the city of Jerusalem shall have no walls, except the protection of the Lord, but shall be extended far and wide. The Jewish people and their royal city shall remain the centre of the manifestations of the Divine glory, just as the city of London still remains the centre of the metropolis; but the nations of the earth shall be joined unto the Lord; so that while Jerusalem remains the city of the Great King, the faithful among the people of all nations shall be, as it were, a suburban population to the chosen city, and the kingdom of the Messiah shall extend far and wide. The city will be rebuilt in more than former splendour—the Jews restored to their own land, and Messiah reign as a prince of the house of David. The text will bear an application to the Church and congregation. 1. *First, let us see the man with the measuring-line in his hand.* It is possible that the man in the text was *nothing but a man.* I have intense reverence to *the angel*, but entire dislike to *the man*, with the measuring-line. Men err in measuring the length and breadth of God's true Church. 2. *Hear the prophecy of a great extension of the kingdom of Christ.* Look for it *now.* Learn that the *supply for all the number shall be* as great *as is required.* The cattle are the provisions for the population. God will give whatever provision the Church wants. *Divine love shall be very sweetly enjoyed among all the members.* The joy of the Divine presence will be common. 3. Observe where this great increase is to come from. From two sources, indicated in vers. 6 and 7. *Multitudes are to come out of the world.* People of God are scattered everywhere, but God knows them and will bring them together. A large number do not believe in Christ, but dwell with the daughter of Babylon. From unconverted men and women we expect the greatest increase through the Spirit's power. We are looking for it, and praying for it; may God grant it [*Spurgeon*].

Vers. 1—4. 1. It is our duty to inquire into God's dealings with his Church, search out his mind, and read his word. 2. Such as would see the true condition of the Church have need of elevated and spiritual minds, enlightened by God. "I lifted up mine eyes," &c. [cf. *Hutcheson*]. 3. Those who inquire in the right spirit shall be lightened to discern the safety and glory of the Church. (1) Enlightened wonderfully. Angels and prophets were commanded to teach. (2) Enlightened earnestly. "Run, speak," &c. "Not go, but run; yea, fly swiftly, with weariness of flight, as Dan. ix. 21. Christ thinks it long ere his praying people hear from him" [*Trapp*].

Ver. 4. *Run, speak.* A sermon to young men. Speak to him of his mental, moral, and spiritual interests. Speak in earnestness, and without delay. "Run." Remember the honour God has conferred upon you in giving you the command to speak. "The angel tells the prophet, but the prophet must tell the people; God using not the ministry of angels, but men, earthen vessels, to bear his name

to his people (Acts viii. 27; ix. 6; xvi. 9" [*Trapp*].

Ver. 5. God the beauty and the bulwark of the Church. His presence a pledge of his protection, a provision for outward and inward wants. Zion's true glory is not in architecture and ritual, in eloquence and music, but in the presence of God's Spirit, converting the sinner and quickening the saint. "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he will appear in glory."

HOMILETICS.

The Call to Quit the World.—*Verses* 6—9.

When God had promised to rebuild and enlarge Jerusalem, dwell in it and glorify it, his people should have been glad to return to it. But all did not obey the proclamation of Cyrus and come back to their own land. Many Jews still remained in Babylon. They are urgently called to leave the devoted city, and avail themselves without delay to return to their own country. Apply this generally, and learn—

I. That God calls men out of the world. "Come forth." Careless and indifferent to their origin and their destiny, they live in ease and forgetfulness of God. Hardened by sin and overcome by the world, they are deaf to entreaty and disobedient to warning. But at length God rouses and restores them to himself. This call to men is—1. *Earnest.* 2. *Repeated.* 3. *Effectual.* **II. That men are reluctant to obey the call.** Through love of the world they are prejudiced against the work and the ways of God. Unwilling to embark in difficulty, they linger in danger. This reluctance springs from many causes. 1. *Continuance in sin obliterates remembrance of spiritual good.* The Jews forgot their own land, and preferred the wealth of Babylon to Jerusalem their chief joy. Worldly men are concerned for nothing beyond present enjoyments. 2. *Present possessions are thought more certain than future good.* The present world to them is real. Power, position, and riches are seen and felt. But they disbelieve in future blessings. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." 3. *Unbelief leads men to disregard all calls to God.* The Jews might doubt the power of God, the sincerity of the proclamation, and the benefits of returning to Jerusalem. The commands of God seem unreasonable, the calls to duty prejudicial to selfish interests, to indolent and wicked men. Others may go to the celestial city, but they remain in the city of destruction. **III. That sufficient motives to comply with the call are presented to men.** God deals with them as reasonable and intelligent creatures. He does not constrain or force men out of the world. Many reasons are given in the text. 1. *Though God has punished yet he loves men.* "For I have spread you abroad as the four winds of heaven." Far and wide had they been dispersed; with violence had they been punished; yet God recalled them, and would have mercy upon them. 2. *Though men have disobeyed the call yet they are not forsaken.* Call after call is given to the Jews. They had been ungrateful and disobedient, but God invites them again with love and urgency. 3. *Though invitations are given to man yet disobedience will endanger their souls.* God was about to destroy Babylon and punish the oppressors, to spoil the nations who had persecuted his people. The alarm is given. "Ho, ho, come forth." 1. In the world is *danger.* "Flee" like Lot from Sodom. Speed your way and lose no time. "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee." 2. In the world is *captivity.* "Deliver thyself." From sin and sloth, from danger and eternal death. "My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and deliver ye every man his soul from the fierce anger of the Lord" (Jer. li. 45; l. 8; li. 6).

The Blessedness of Israel, and the Perils of her Persecutors.—*Verse* 8.

That God will avenge his people is a doctrine of the New as of the Old Testament (2 Thess. i. 6). For our comfort we shall describe those whom God

avenges; in order to excite to adoration, show the intensity of Divine sympathy; for the purpose of warning, refer to the perils of persecutors; and for the fortifying of patience, point out the season of vengeance.

I. The subjects of the Lord's concern. "He that toucheth you." 1. *A sinful and perverse people.* Not a nation of Enochs, Abrahams, nor Johns, but an erring, provoking nation. 2. *An afflicted and chastened people.* Here is the secret of concern. A father pities his petulant and wayward child if he be wounded and troubled. 3. *A chosen people.* God could choose no other but a sinful people, for the whole earth was corrupt. He chose them, knowing their future sins—ordained that from them should come the Saviour of the world. 4. *A penitent people.* God comforts none of his servants until they mourn their sinfulness and perversity. He always loves them, but the beam of his consolation cannot reach them when they wilfully immure themselves in the strongholds of sin. **II. The intensity of Divine sympathy.** "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." Tears flow at once if the eye be touched. In this figure we see the truth illustrated—1. *That the sufferings of the saints personally affect the Lord.* He is far more affected by the malice of our enemies than we are. Our sufferings compared with his are as the striking of the body to the wounding of the eye. When Jesus hung upon the cross they touched the apple of his eye. 2. We learn also *that the Lord feels our woes instantly.* The idea seems to be that the moment the saints are touched the Lord is. However sudden the attack, he knows and feels. **III. The peril of persecutors.** The pronoun *his*, is understood by some as referring to the subjects of Divine vengeance. Whether it be so or not, this is certain—they stand under condemnation. To touch a king or a king's son is treason. God accounts indignities offered to Israel as indignities offered to himself. Pharaoh touched them and was destroyed; the Amalekites and Canaanites fought against them and were defeated; Assyrians strove to enslave them and were discomfited. Babylon was laid in the dust; Rome was spoiled, and ultimately ruined. **IV. The season of vengeance** "After the glory." After the return to their own land; after their penitence and purification. It was in God's own time. When the saints have entered the New Jerusalem, their robes being made white, then the Lord will avenge his own elect in a special and final sense.—*Stems and Twigs.*

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 7, 8. Two classes addressed. 1. *The careless and indifferent.* Those in the world, living in ease and sin. 2. *Those in Babylon who should be in Zion.* Christians are out of their place in the pleasures and pursuits of the world. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you," &c. (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18: Rev. xviii. 4).

Vers. 8, 9. The Messiah, not the prophet nor the angel mentioned (ver. 4), is here intended. "Observe the evidence of the *Divinity* of the speaker here, in the terms used by him: '*I will shake my hand at them.*' This can be the language of no other than Jehovah; and yet it is the language of one who speaks of '*Jehovah*' as having '*sent him*'"—[*Wardlaw*].

We have here the twofold object of Christ's mission. 1. *To glorify the Church.* "After the glory"—in restoring and edifying the Church. Manifesting his glory to his people (John xvii. 6). 2. *To destroy the enemies.* He hath "sent me to the nations which spoiled you." Mark—(1) *The ease with which this is done.* "I will shake mine hand upon them." A mere wave of the hand is sufficient to crush all opposition. What must be the *stroke* of the hand, if the mere shaking will prostrate the foe! (2) *The power with which this is done.* The nations are spoiled of their strength and honour—made slaves to those over whom they tyrannized. 3. *To reveal God to men.* "And ye shall know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me."

Ver. 8. How admirably adapted to

popular instruction and impression is the imagery of Scripture. Who does not in a moment understand and feel the allusion before us? "He that toucheth you," &c. It reminds us of *union:* it shows *valuation:* it bespeaks *attention:* it expresses *sympathy.* Let the adversaries of his people learn their danger. Let this encourage us to do anything for the people of God. Let his people also learn to do their duty. If God is so concerned for them, how should they regard and be concerned for his glory [*Jay*].

HOMILETICS.

The Glory of the Messiah's Kingdom.—*Verses* 10—13.

These words look beyond the Jewish restoration, to the earlier and remoter times of the Messiah. With his appearance and residence are connected the return of his people to his service and glory, and the extension of his kingdom among the heathen. In prospect of this glory, the people are called to exult with joy. The glorification of this kingdom consists in the following privileges:—

I. In the residence of its King. "Lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord." The greater the resident the more dignified the house. God dwelt with his people in type and shadow, in the glory of the temple and the blessings of his Spirit. Literally, in Christ's first and future coming; spiritually, in the power of his grace over heart and life. We have not a mere poet, statesman, or prophet, but the great God himself, dwelling with individuals and sections of the Christian community. "God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (2 Cor. vi. 16: Ezek. xxxvii. 27: Zech. viii. 3). **II. In the extension of its dominion.** "Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day." Proud exclusiveness shall cease; the walls of partition shall be broken down; and Jew and Gentile shall become subjects of one King. Hence extension. 1. *By the restoration of the Jews.* "The Lord shall inherit Judah." "It was to be on the principle, *to the Jew first*," says Wardlaw. "Among that people was he to appear and dwell while on earth. The chosen people were not to be utterly and finally cast off. He would again restore them in mercy; gather from their so much wider and longer-continued dispersions; restore them anew to the land of their fathers and the city of their God (ver 12)." 2. *By the adoption of other nations.* "Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day." New converts shall inherit the blessings of the chosen people. An abundant increase is promised to the mere handful of Jews. This is the purpose for which Israel existed and was restored (Jer. xxiv. 7; xxx. 22: Ezek. xi. 20; xiv. 11). Gentiles shall be grafted in with Jews (Rom. xi. 23); Jerusalem shall become the centre of glory, the throne of God, and one law shall rule the stranger and the homeborn (Ex. xii. 49). "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all nations shall be gathered unto it." **III. In the grandeur of its achievements.** Earthly kingdoms achieve greatness and create happiness by wealth, power, and war. True glory springs from spiritual birth and God's presence. 1. *Great joy will result to this kingdom.* "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion." Those only can rejoice who have been restored to God and recovered their purity—those with whom God dwells, and whom *he* bids rejoice and sing. (1) This joy *is abundant.* "It is a great jubilee of joy, to which Zion is invited. Thrice besides is she invited with the same word (Isa. liv. 1: Zeph. iii. 14, 15: Isa. xii. 6), and all for the restored and renewed presence of God" [*Pusey*]. (2) This joy is bestowed *in circumstances unlikely.* Rejoice in trouble and opposition! Yes, it is not unseasonable then. Do we not seek medicine in sickness, music in mourning? "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee." 2. *Universal submission will result to this kingdom.* "Be silent (hush), O all flesh, before the Lord." Unbelievers among the Jews are not to

doubt God's promise, and enemies in all nations are to fear his power. All opposition will be subdued. Willingly or unwillingly men must submit in the day of God's power. How foolish to measure wisdom and compare strength with God, to "contend with him that is mightier than they!" Learn to reverence God's authority, to hear providential warnings, before he is roused for the last act of justice, to pronounce the doom, and fix the eternal condition of millions. "Thou, even thou, art to be feared; and who may stand in thy sight, when once thou art angry?"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 10—12. The joy of the Church springs from *three* sources. 1. The presence of Christ. 2. The increase of numbers. 3. The gathering together and possession of God's people [cf. *Hutcheson*].

Ver. 11. (First clause.) The formation of national brotherhood by Christianity. 1. *Christianity alone affords a basis for it.* Socialism, communism, &c., do not. Society built upon any other foundation will fall, and great will be the fall. 2. *Christianity alone can cement it together.* Education, science, and philosophy useful, but not sufficient. 3. *Christianity alone guarantees it.* "Nations *shall be* joined." "I will mention Rahab and Babylon as knowing me. Lo, Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia. (To each of which it shall be said), This nation was born there" (in Zion) (Ps. lxxxvii. 4.)

> "Mark ye well Philistia's legions,
> Lo, to seek the Lord they come;
> And within the sacred regions
> Tyre and Cush have found a home."

Thou shalt know, &c. The manifestation of the unity of the Church a proof of the Messiah's commission. When nations know God, the world will know saving truth (John xvii 21—23).

Ver. 12. 1. *The inheritance.* "Judah." The joining of nations did not destroy God's covenant with his ancient people. Hence this assurance that he would "again" be the *portion* of Israel (Jer. x. 16; li. 19: Deut. xxxii. 9). "Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance." 2. *The place.* "In the holy land." The land is again made holy by God, and sanctified by his presence. So he calls the place where he revealed himself to Moses *holy ground* (Ex. iii. 5). "It is not one technical expression, as people now by a sort of effort speak of 'the holy land.' Everything which has reference to God is holy. The land is holy, not for any merits of theirs, but because God was worshipped there, was specially present there. It was an anticipation and type of "thy holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge thee" [*Pusey*].

Ver. 13. Three reasons for silence implied. 1. They are but "flesh," weak and ignorant. 2. He is *Jehovah*, all-wise and all-powerful. 3. He is already "raised up out of his place," and who can stand before him? [*A. R. Fausset.*]

If God do but awake for us, all is presently well with us. Therefore, when the Church was in her return from Babylon the prophet concludes with an exultation of spirit. *Be silent*, &c. "All flesh, ye that are wicked of the world, ye that are enemies, be ye silent; leave your boasting, your reproaching, and blaspheming, for the Lord is awaked; now he begins to stir for his people, he will stop your mouths shortly. *All flesh* takes in the Church and people of God too. *O be ye silent*, in regard of your fears and doubtings, murmurings and distracted complainings: silence all these, why? *The Lord is awaked, he is raised up out of his holy habitation;* that is, he that seemed before to confine himself to those higher regions, as atheists speak in *Job*, to walk in the circle of the heavens, not intermeddling with the earth: this God is now awaked, raised out of his holy habitation, and now ye shall know that he orders all things here below; therefore be silent, all flesh" [*Caryl*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1—4. *Behold, a man.* All Zechariah's visions are remarkably simple. They are not like Isaiah's, when he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; nor like Ezekiel's, when he beheld living creatures with four faces, and wheels full of eyes. Zechariah had not imagination enough to be capable of beholding with due appreciation visions so complicated and mysterious. He was not the proper instrument of God for the revelation of those more mysterious matters: but the Lord had a place for him, and a vision for him too. How sweet to be a servant of God in *any* position [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 5. *Wall.* China is said to be protected by a wall of stone; old England is shielded by her wooden walls; but the Church of God has a better wall still, for she has the Divine wall of fire; her enemies cannot break through this to destroy the meanest of her citizens, and her false friends shall say to themselves, "Who among us can dwell with eternal burnings?" and so shall start back from a Church which is visibly sheltered and protected by the presence of the Most High [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 7. *Deliver thyself.*

> "How vain and poor, and little worth,
> Are all these glittering toys of earth
> That lure us here!
> Dreams of sleep, that death must break,
> Alas! before it bids us wake,
> Ye disappear" [*Manrique*].

Ver. 8. *Apple.* It is a charming image. The *eye* is one of the most intricate and delicate structures in the human frame; and the pupil of the eye —the opening by which the light of heaven enters for the purpose of vision, —the most delicate and easily injured, as well as important, part of that structure. Nothing can more finely convey the idea of the sensitively tender care of Jehovah for the objects of his love. There are many figures in the Bible expressive of the same sentiment: there is no one more exquisitely beautiful than this [*Wardlaw*].

Ver. 9. *Shake.* God is known by his power; that power is known by his works; and how shall we approach to estimate him, unless we examine those works? [*Macculloch*].

Vers. 10—12. *Rejoice.* To be happy we must be blessed with the presence of the Holy Spirit. In adversity, in prosperity, in sickness and in health, our joys will be pure, our sorrows will be lightened, with this holy emanation of the Deity in our bosoms. Natural evil we must feel; moral evil and its effects we shall often experience; but there will still remain in our hearts, if regenerated, a cordial drop, a source of sweet enjoyment, of which no external circumstances can utterly deprive us [*V. Knox*].

Ver. 11. *Nations.* The Jews' unbelief was a step whereby the Gentiles arose to the knowledge of the gospel; as the setting of the sun in one place is the rising of it in another [*Charnock*].

Ver. 13. *Silent.* The prophet, like a crier in a court, commands or proclaims silence. The Hebrew word means *hush*, inhibiting speech. Yield all reverence, respect and fear, stand in awe. Let the wicked silence their vain boasts and the godly their vain fears. Let neither the one nor the other utter a word before the Lord [*Caryl*]. How readily can Jehovah command an audience! It may be that in the latter days he will, by some such miracles of power in the realms of grace, constrain all earth's inhabitants to attend to the gospel, and submit to the reign of his all-glorious Son [*Spurgeon*].

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **He**] The interpreting angel. **Standing**] As before a judge (Num. xxxv. 12: Deut. xix. 17: 1 Kings iii. 16). A judicial transaction represented, say some. But the high priest is described as having entered the new temple, taken his position before the altar, and was about to offer sacrifice for the people, when he was opposed by Satan [*Henderson*]. **Satan**] No human adversary; lit. *the* adversary. **Right**] The side of the accuser (Ps. cix. 6: Job xxx. 12). **Resist**] Impede or oppose, by dwelling upon the sins of high priest and people (cf. ver. 3). **2. Jehovah**] *i. e.* the angel of, said. **Rebuke**] Twice repeated, "for the sake of emphasis, and with the repetition the motive which led Jehovah to reject the accuser is added" [*Keil*]. God will not only nonsuit, but reprove by act, and overcome the accuser (Ps. ix. 5; cxix. 21). **Plucked**] Delivered from Babylon. God will not desert them; though defiled by sin, he will cleanse them. **3. Filthy**] garments worn generally by those on trial among the Romans, but here represent the guilt and punishment of the Jews, as removal, and investment of splendid attire, indicate restoration to enjoyment and privileges. **4. Stood**] Ministering angels, honoured with standing continually before the great King (cf. 1 Kings x. 8: Dan. i. 5). **To pass**] *i. e.* removed its guilt; remit, forgive, and justify (2 Sam. xii. 13: xxiv. 10). **5.**] The nation not only to be forgiven but glorified. **Let**] The prophet asks help. **Mitre**] The priesthood restored; and its *fair* colour symbolizes its official purity and order—to the wish complied with. **6—10.**] Here the symbolic act of reclothing is made the occasion of a prophetic address through the high priest to the nation. **Protested**] Testified, made a solemn declaration as one on oath (Gen. xliii. 3: Deut. viii. 19). **Walk**] God's promise was connected with their observance of his ordinances. **Then**] Certain privileges. **Judge**] Administer right, viz. "in relation to the duties devolving upon the high priest in the sanctuary as such: hence, right administration of the service in the holy place and Holy of Holies" [*Keil*]. The priestly family of Joshua would take a part in the future government of the nation. **Places**] Guides. **Stand by**] Angels. "The import of the promise is, that he and his successors in office should enjoy the care, direction, and aid of celestial spirits in the management of the national affairs" [*Henderson*]. **8. Fellows**] Thy associates in the priesthood. **Wondered**] Men of wonder, of sign or portent; typical men, foreshadowing future persons or events (cf. Isa. viii. 18: Ezek. xii. 6). **Branch**] All expositors admit this to be the Messiah, the *servant* (Isa. xlii. 1); the *sprout* from the stem of Jesse (Jer. xxiii. 5: Isa. ii. 1, 2; liii. 2). **9. Stone**] Foundation by God, the chief builder, which should be the object of his special care. **Eyes**] upon a thing denote vigilance and care (cf. Ps. xxxii. 8). **Seven**] denotes perfection; these not *carved* upon the stone [*Calvin*], but directed towards; fixed upon the covenant people (cf. Rev. v. 6). **Engrave**] Lit. "I will *open* the *opening* of it." What kind of ornaments it does not say, "but that they were cut out or engraven in the foundation-stone, the exigency of the place requires, except we regard the stone as here used by synecdoche for the whole temple, in which case reference will be had to the finishing off of the structure, the foundation of which had been laid in the presence of Joshua" [*Henderson*]. **Land**] of Israel with its inhabitants representative of the Christian Church. **Remove**] the punishment to which Jews had been exposed. **Day**] The day of national atonement celebrated after completion of the temple (Lev. xxiii. 27); typical of day of atonement by Christ (Heb. x. 10—12; vii. 27). **10 Under**] A proverbial description of a happy period (1 Kings iv. 25); an emblem of tranquil prosperity (Mic. iv. 4); of personal and social peace in the gospel; and of the blessed condition flowing from a purified Church.

HOMILETICS.

JOSHUA RESISTED AND ESTABLISHED IN HIS WORK.—*Verses* 1—5.

This fourth vision is an encouragement to the people in their work. In the person of the high priest they stand before Jehovah opposed by Satan, assisted by Christ, and restored to covenant blessings.

I. Joshua resisted in his work. The condition was critical, but God made it known to the prophet. "He showed me Joshua." 1. *Joshua resisted in his service.* "The high priest standing," not as a criminal, but officiating as priest, and ministering to Jehovah (Deut. x. 8). He is engaged in prayer, anxious for the people; but opposed in his work. Honourable duty and nearness to God will not exempt from opposition and temptation. Satan presented himself with the sons of

God (Job i. 6). 2. *Joshua resisted in his filthy garments.* Filth is caused by sin. The soiled robes were emblematic of his own and the sins of the people—of their unworthy and abject state before God. The nation had been chastised, but its guilt was not cleansed. Gross wickedness may be forsaken, but the power of sin, self-righteousness, and refined idolatry remain. The garments of all Christians should be clean, "for glory and for beauty" (Ex. xxviii. 2). If stained with filth they taint the dignity of office, and bring accusation against it. How God bears with our manifold infirmities! "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." 3. *Joshua resisted by Satan.* "And Satan standing at his (Joshua's) right hand." Satan, one of the highest created spirits, has become the tempter and accuser of men—the most finished example of perverted will and unsanctified power in the universe. He would probably be mortified at the return of Divine favour to the Jews—plead their sinfulness and unfitness for the work, and desire that God would cast them off and recall his grace. This was a vital issue for that day, and for the history of redemption in all ages. It touched the existence of God's kingdom and the coming of the Messiah on earth. (1) *He resisted with energy.* He is strong and experienced in his work, diligent in mischief, and ever seeking opportunities to do it (1 Pet. v. 8). (2) *He resisted in the fittest place.* The right hand is advantageous ground for one who impedes or opposes another. When the enemy can choose his position in fight, it is of great service to him. The subtlety and power of the adversary, the guilt and weakness of men, give every opportunity for success. Satan often gets the advantage, and seems likely to triumph over us. "Let Satan stand at his right hand" (Ps. cix. 6). (3) *He resisted at the fittest time.* The Jews had only just returned from captivity, were few and weak, and not very earnest in their work. God's people are attacked, like Christ, when weakened by nature (Matt. iv. 2), when resistance seems impossible. When a man is down, little will crush or overcome him. Occasions of trial are chosen that the fall may be more disgraceful (Isa. xxi. 4). "In the greatest calm provide for a storm," said Elizabeth. "A day may have a fair beginning and a foul ending." **II. Joshua established in his work.** He had a defender who confounded and rebuked the adversary in his evil design. "The Lord said unto Satan," &c. 1. *His adversary is defeated.* (*a*) *Defeated by the Lord.* "The Lord rebuke thee." Satan was checked by one who silenced him without arguments. Christ himself gave him into the hand of God, and effectually withered him with rebuke (Mark i. 25, 26: Luke iv. 35). "We have an Advocate with the Father." (*b*) *Defeated by the Lord in love to his people.* They had no merit in themselves. It was enough that he had chosen them. "The Lord hath chosen Jerusalem," and maintained his choice in all its integrity. The nation is acquitted, not because the charges of Satan were false, but out of God's free love to them. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" 2. *His sins are forgiven.* "I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee." The filthy garments were taken away, and sin completely and freely forgiven. In Christ Divine wrath is appeased, polluted nature cleansed, and guilty man justified before a holy God. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." 3. *His privileges are restored.* God not only acquits but restores to all the honours and duties of office, justifies and sanctifies. (1) *The priesthood was restored.* He was clothed with change of raiment. The robes of the high priest were put upon him, and he ministered for the people. (2) *Its official qualification was given.* Priestly vestments did not complete the attire. The "*mitre*," the turban of pure white linen, with its holy crown, was wanting. "Set a fair mitre upon his head." Men are washed and decorated to be qualified for work. Ministers and teachers must be holy and adorned with the crown. Engraven on their breast-plate must be the title

of their office, and the aim of their life, "Holiness to the Lord" (Ex. xxviii. 36). 'Thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre."

We may take Joshua as a type of all the people of God, as they stand in their sense of sin and natural faultiness, subject to the accusation of Satan, but delivered by their gracious Lord; and the change of raiment as setting forth the forgiveness of sin and the imputation of the Saviour's righteousness, which is the joy of all believers. Let us take each particular separately. I. To begin where the vision begins—with **the believer himself, represented by Joshua**. He is described as a priest, standing before the angel of the Lord. Mark this. *He is a priest.* Certain sons of Korah claim to be legitimate descendants of apostles, and pretend to be priests in a special sense. But the apostles claimed no priority beyond others (1 Pet. ii. 5). Every humble man and woman that knows Christ's power in the soul—that has been cleansed from dead works—is appointed to serve as a priest unto God. But observe, the high priest is "*standing before the angel of the Lord*—" standing to minister. This should be the perpetual position of the believer; not in a bed of sloth, or wandering about for private business. He is appointed priest *for ever;* should always be offering sacrifice, and attending to the duties of his high calling. He ministers *before the angel* of Jehovah. He can never stand to minister before Moses, the mediator under the law; much less before Jehovah himself, for our God is a consuming fire. It is only through a Mediator that we poor defiled ones can ever become priests unto God. Read the next word in the light of your own experience. "Clothed with filthy garments." Did you ever feel this in coming to God? Perhaps at evening prayer, unable as the head of the household to pray—in your business kept up late, and distracted in the house of God. How can we hope for a blessing on anything we do, with a heart of unbelief! But do not let a sense of unfitness keep you from service—lead you to renounce your priesthood. Stand where you are, and remember it is the only place where sin can be washed and prayer accepted. II. Let us turn to another individual. **An adversary**. Satan stood before the angel to resist Joshua. Observe the name, *Satan,* which signifies *an adversary.* An adversary by nature, who is so vile that he cannot help being the adversary of everything good. This adversary *selected a most fitting place.* He accused him before the angel—before God's own Son. He does not attack Joshua first, but seeks to prevent his acceptance. If once persuaded that you are not God's children and not accepted before him, he knows that serious injury is done us. He selected a *fit opportunity*—when Joshua had his filthy garments on. Expect, when you have lost your sense of justification, when conscious of sin, and you feel unfit to minister before God, that he will come to accuse you. III. Here is a very gloomy picture—the believer willing, but quite unable, to minister unto the Lord; but the **Angel speaks**. He has been silent till now. *This rebuke comes at the right season.* When Satan accuses, Christ pleads. He does not wait until the case has gone against us—then express regret; but is always a present help. He knows the heart of Satan, being omniscient; and long before he can accuse, puts in the plea on our behalf, and stays the action till he gives the answer to silence every accusation. This rebuke *came from the very highest authority.* "Jehovah rebuke thee, O Satan." If God hath chosen his people, it is no use for Satan to attempt their overthrow. *The rebuke is forcibly applicable to the case in hand.* Satan says, "The man's garments are filthy." "Well," says Jesus, "how do you expect them to be otherwise? When you pull a brand out of the fire, do you expect it milk-white or polished?" This plea *did not require a single word to be added to it from Joshua.* This so silenced the devil that he was speechless. He has often made out a case against us, but been nonplussed! "I will sift him like wheat in my sieve." His plans would succeed, but there is a "but" in the way (unfortunate for him, fortunate for us). "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." IV. **A matchless deed of**

grace, is the soul of the text. Sin is removed. "Take away the filthy garments from him." The order is given to clothe him. "I will clothe thee with change of raiment." The righteousness of Christ is given to the believer. One thing more. The prophet was so astonished to see the change that he broke out and spake himself. "And I *said*, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head." Some of God's people get as far as imputed righteousness, believe themselves to be accepted in the Beloved, but tarry there. Put on your mitre, and praise the covenant angel, who in Jehovah's name has taken away your filthy garments. Notice the closing sentence. "The angel of the Lord stood by." We want him always to stand by, though clothed with new garments, and crowned with the mitre. We want his strength, comfort, and the light of his countenance. "Abide with us," must be our daily prayer [From *Spurgeon*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. There are two grounds on which the rebuke of Satan proceeds. 1. *Jehovah's choice of, or delight in, Jerusalem.* "The Lord that hath chosen (or that delighteth in Jerusalem) rebuke thee." Satan knew full well that in his opposition to Joshua, to prevent his officiating as priest, he was *opposing Jehovah*, who had returned in loving-kindness to Jerusalem. *He* would have that loving-kindness kept back and turned away, and the punishment of their sins continued; and would thus have interdicted the blessing of Jehovah. Since it was the pleasure of Jehovah he was seeking to hinder, it was appropriate that the rebuke should come *from him.* 2. The *malice*—the *envious and deadly* spite of the *devil*, stands here in contrast with the *benevolence*—the *relenting forbearance and love of Jehovah.* "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" The question must be understood, not of Joshua considered only *personally*, but *representatively*—as relating to the rescue of the people as well as himself from oppression and wrong, and, if their enemies had had their will, extinction; and the deliverance and restoration of the very *office* of Joshua—the priestly office—which, without such Divine interposition, might have been lost. Satan would have had the brand kept in the fire till it was consumed. But Jehovah's power, and goodness, and faithfulness, had plucked it out of the flames—rescued it from such consumption. The rebuke is evidently that of indignant supremacy and offended benevolence, directed at once against malignity and presumption [*Wardlaw*].

Is not this a brand? &c. 1. If delivered once, is it reasonable to cast them into the furnace again? Persecutors in the days of Queen Mary were cruel enough for this; but we must have compassion upon men, "pulling them out of the fire" (Jude 22). How much more will God have pity! 2. If God loves his people, shall he change? Never! Though stained with dirt and scorched with fire, he will never cast them off. Like the three worthies (Dan. iii. 20), they will be delivered from fire and promoted to honour The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. *Rebuke thee.* 1. This a warning against the sarcastic, bitter, and virulent spirit which so often shows itself in speaking and writing against others [*Wordsworth*]. 2. A lesson not to argue with the tempter, but refer him to the Saviour, whose rebuke is powerful and successful (Ps. lxxx. 6: Matt. iv. 10).

Vers. 3—5. Two things are here said to belong to free acceptance with God. (1) The taking away of the guilt of our sin, our filthy robes; this is done by the death of Christ, the proper fruit of which is the remission of sin. (2) But more is required; even a collation of righteousness, and thereby a right to eternal life. This is called a change of raiment, or, as in Isaiah lxi. 10, the garments of salvation, the robe of righteousness. This is made ours only by the obedience of Christ, as the other is by his death [*Owen*].

We may learn from the whole—1.

That those whom God redeems he will cause to serve him. 2. That though sin may pollute, God freely forgives them. 3. That God's deliverance and forgiveness, cleansing and love, should be a reason for confidence in prayer, a support in temptation, and a motive to activity in service.

HOMILETICS.

GREAT PROMISES ON SPECIFIED CONDITIONS.—*Verses* 6, 7.

We have here three things promised, or engaged for—and the promise made to depend on certain conditions. It matters not which of the two we notice first; we may take them as they stand.

I. **The specified conditions.** The stipulations are these: "If thou wilt *walk in my ways*, and *keep my charge*" (marg., *ordinance*). These two conditions are closely connected. 1. *Personal holiness.* The former relates to personal character and conduct. He was to be found obedient to God's precepts; exemplifying in his own character the sanctity and moral rectitude which it was part of the duty of the priest to inculcate on the people: "for the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." 2. *Official faithfulness.* He was to keep the charge of Jehovah, *i. e.* faithfully to perform all official duties, punctually to attend to every enjoined function of his commission; keeping all the ordinances, as God had delivered them to Moses (Lev. viii. 35). II. **The great promises.** Three things depended upon these conditions. 1. Thou shalt "*judge my house.*" The word house does not mean *temple*, but *household*. "The house of Jacob" is a designation of Israel, who were regarded and repeatedly spoken of as the family of Jehovah. "I am a father to Israel.' To judge his house, then, is the same thing as to rule his people. This, you think, did not pertain to the priesthood; but it is remarkable how it thus turned out, in regard to the priestly lineage in the family of Joshua. Not in the person of Joshua himself; but after Nehemiah's death, a large portion of the management of the civil affairs of Judea was committed by the Syrian prefects into the hands of the high priest; and it was more fully realized in the time of the Maccabean high priests, in whom the civil and the sacred were eminently united. When these princely priests failed in the conditions here specified in the arrangements of providence, the glory departed. 2. Thou shalt "*also keep my courts.*" He was to continue to have the charge of God's house, to minister in the holy place, and superintend the entire system of the sacerdotal and Levitical services. His continuance in this high and honourable office,—that is, in the way of succession in his lineage, depended on the conditions mentioned, of personal obedience and official fidelity. It is the same style of conditionality with that on which Jehovah promised to Israel generally, and took them into covenant: "Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." 3. I will give thee "*places to walk among these that stand by.*" By "these that stand by" are meant, the *attendant angels*. The difficulty here is with the word rendered "places to walk" (marg., *walks*). The original in some degree is ambiguous. But from the conjugation of the verb to which as a participle it belongs, we are disposed to acquiesce in the judgment of *Henderson*, who makes it to signify, neither walks nor walkers, but those who guide or conduct in walking:—"I will give thee ministering guides among these that stand by." No sense can correspond better than this with all that we learn from the previous history of the Jewish people from the call of Abraham onwards, respecting the *ministration of angels*. It is a promise, then, of the aid and direction of those who surround the Divine throne, 'the ministerings spirits sent

forth to minister to the heirs of salvation." If the rendering "*walks*," or "*places to walk*," be retained (though we feel doubtful), then the promise will be a higher one still—namely, that of an association with angelic spirits from heaven [Adapted from *Wardlaw*].

Men of Wonder.—*Verse* 8.

The Jewish economy was typical in its aim. Its sacerdotal institutions were "shadows of good things to come." Hence, "Joshua and his fellows that sat before him"—inferior priests, who officially ministered to the high priest—are termed men of signs. They typified the Messiah here promised, and those whom the Messiah admits to share his priesthood (1 Pet. ii. 5 : Rev. v. 10). These words might be taken—*First*, as a pledge to the desponding Jews that the priesthood would be preserved until Christ came. *Secondly*, as a reproof to the unbelieving multitude, who wonder at God's people with incredulity (Ps. lxxi. 7 : Isa. viii. 18). Apply the words to Christians.

I. They are a wonder to themselves. They are astonished at God's love to them—amazed to think of his grace and goodness. Why are they called, while others refuse to come? They were chosen not because better than others, not on account of their foreseen repentance and faith. "I am a wonder to myself," said one. "I am a miracle of grace," said another. "By the grace of God, I am what I am." **II. They are a wonder to their fellow-men.** Believers are "to thousand eyes a mark and gaze." They are not understood in their spirit, habits, and employments. To the wicked, they are a puzzle. They are often feared, despised, and persecuted. Their spiritual birth is a mystery of mercy, their life a constant reproof to the ungodly, and their death a triumph of grace. "I am as a wonder unto many." "Behold I, and the children whom the Lord hath given me, are for signs and wonders in Israel, from the Lord of hosts." **III. They are a wonder to angels.** Angels take deep interest in redeemed men, and wonder at their characters and pursuits. As Jesus was "seen of angels," so are his people. "Lest" in the judgment of the world, they are deemed by heavenly hosts worthy of intense regard. "For we are made a spectacle (theatrical exhibition) unto the world, and to angels (good and bad), and to men" (1 Cor. iv. 9).

My Servant, the Branch.—*Verse* 9.

Only one person is here typified by the Jewish high priests, and most commentators admit this person to be the Messiah, under the titles of the text.

I. My Servant. 1. Under this title was *Christ predicted*. This was the characteristic name of the Messiah. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isa. xlii. 1; xlix. 3; liii. 11 : Ezek. xxxiv. 23) 2. Under this capacity he *appeared on earth*. "I am among you as one that serveth." Thus honouring service, and dignifying the humblest calling. "Who made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." 3. In this capacity he *rendered most eminent service*. No one ever merited this title like him. He rendered a service most signal and gracious, which no one in the universe could perform beside. "Being formed in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." **II. The Branch.** He is "the branch of the Lord" (Isa. iv. 2); "a righteous branch" (Jer. xxiii. 5); "the branch of righteousness" (Jer. xxiii. 15). He is the tender branch from the almost extinct royal line of David. Not "a limb, in the sense of one among many on the same tree, but a shoot which springs up from the root; and which, though small at first, becomes a tree of wonderful qualities" [*Cowles*]. This marks—(1) His humble origin; (2) gradual growth; and (3) ultimate prosperity. In course of time the tender shoot would become the

monarch of the forest, and under its mighty branches and beautiful foliage the nations of the earth would take shelter.

THE MISSION OF THE MESSIAH AND ITS RESULTS.—*Verses* 8—10

These words point to the author of the blessings promised—to him by whom sin was to be expiated, and the kingdom of God flourish. They set forth the mission of the "servant, the Branch," and the results of that mission in the building of a more glorious temple than that of Solomon or Zerubabbel.

I. The method of his coming. He comes as a servant, and as the sprout. 1. *As a branch.* "According to which the Messiah is to spring up as a rod out of the stem of Jesse that has been hewn down, or as a root-shoot out of a dry ground. *Tsemach*, therefore, denotes the Messiah in his origin from the family of David, that has fallen into humiliation, as a sprout which will grow up from its original state of humiliation to exaltation and glory, and answers therefore to the train of thought in this passage, in which the deeply humiliated priesthood is exalted by the grace of the Lord into a type of the Messiah" [*Keil*]. 2. *A branch Divinely caused to grow.* "I will bring forth my servant, the Branch." God himself undertakes to bring him forth. He is God's servant, and will have to do God's work. He came from the bosom of the Father, and was upheld until he had done the will of the Father. "Thus speaketh the Lord of Hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is the Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord." **II. The nature of his work.** 1. *To prepare the kingdom of God.* "I will engrave the graving thereof" (ver. 9), *i. e.* engrave it so as to prepare it for a beautiful and costly stone. "The preparation of this stone, *i. e.* the preparation of the kingdom of God, established in Israel by the powers of the Spirit of the Lord, is one feature in which the bringing in of the *tsemach* will show itself" [*Keil*]. 2. *To remove iniquity.* "And I will remove the iniquity of that land." The removal of punishment from the Jews was typical of the remission of sins by the atonement of Jesus Christ. (1) *From the Jews.* From "that land"—multiform and aggravated as that was (Jer. l. 20). (2) *From all nations.* To the Jew first, then the Gentile (Acts iii. 26). (3) "*In one day.*" The wiping away will not be imperfect and continually repeated; but once and for ever taken away. "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. x. 12; ix. 26; vii. 27). **III. The results which flow from the completion of his work.** When guilt is taken away, discontent and misery will be swept away; peace and prosperity will be enjoyed by a purified Church. We have a figure (ver. 10) for a state of repose—peace, security, personal and social. The peaceful influence of the gospel was felt from the first—individually, in the soul of each subject of it; socially, in the intercourse of all. Jew dwelt in peace with fellow-Jew; and even Gentiles were numbered among neighbours and brethren, who before were aliens and outcasts, "hated with perfect hatred." The proclamation was to be, "Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is nigh" - and the corresponding effect of it was, "He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition" [*Wardlaw.*] "They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it."

> "No sound of war is heard—no thought of sin,
> But one sole word, 'Peace—Peace.'"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 8. *Sign men.* 1. Wonderful in and restored to God and duty. 2. *their experience.* Delivered, pardoned, Wonderful in *their manners.* Despising

pleasures which others esteem; pursuing paths which others term folly. "They think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot; speaking evil of you." 3. Wonderful in *their character.* Redeemed and made holy—types of future converts, and of all priests unto God.

Ver. 9. *The stone.* Taking it as the foundation-stone of the temple. 1. *Its laying.* By God, before Joshua. 2. *Its protection.* "Upon one stone, seven eyes." "The eye," says Wardlaw, "is the natural hieroglyphic for *knowledge;* and *seven,* as every reader of the Bible is aware, is the number used to denote *completeness, perfection.* '*Seven eyes*' denote the perfection of observant knowledge: and as 'the eyes of Jehovah' mean Jehovah's observation and knowledge, his '*seven eyes*' express the perfection of both—omniscient observation"—(cf. chap. iv. 10). Hence this is a proof of—(1) *Providential care;* and (2) an encouragement to the Jews in work. Taking the stone with many as representing Christ, notice—1. God declares that he lays (Heb.), that he *gives* a stone before Joshua, lit. *before his face,* to defend him, and in order that he may place it as the foundation and corner-stone of his building, which symbolized the Church, of which the corner-stone is Christ (Isa. xxviii. 16: Ephes. ii. 20: 1 Pet. ii. 6). 2. The stone is *graven,* like the precious stones in the breastplate of the high priest, with the names of the tribes upon them (Ex. xxviii. 21: cf. original in 2 Tim. ii. 19; and Rev. xxi. 14). 3. The figure here is *of eyes,* emblems of light (cf. Matt. vi. 22: Ezek. i. 18: Rev. iv. 4—6). The stone is not a dark, lifeless stone, like other stones, but a *living, seeing* stone. 4. Those eyes are *seven,* signifying completeness, representing the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit with which the Messiah was anointed, animated, strengthened, and enlightened (Isa. xi. 2); indicating the perfection of the spiritual illumination and perpetual watchfulness of Christ [*Words.*]. The language is future: "I *will* engrave the graving (or the sculpture) thereof." As the *stone* is a figure, so is the engraving that of hieroglyphic eyes, which may convey a *twofold* meaning. The *first,* certainly, that the eyes of Jehovah should be continually upon it, with intense and delighted interest; and upon the glorious spiritual structure that was to rest upon it, marking its progressive advancement to its final completion. The idea is the same as that expressed respecting the land of Canaan: "The eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end." The *second,* one which I express with hesitation, because not sure about the propriety of assigning two meanings to one hieroglyphic. I cannot forget that the stone represents a person, and that person Divine. *Jesus Christ himself* is the "chief corner-stone." May not the engraving of the seven eyes, then, convey the additional idea of the *Deity* of him whom the stone represented—as himself the possessor of Divine omniscience; which could say—"All the churches shall know, that I am he that search-th the reins and the hearts" [*Wardlaw*].

Seven eyes upon one stone. Observe the notice that Christ was to excite and engage. The eye of *God* was upon him. He had complacency in contemplating him in the redemption of his people. The eyes of *angels* were upon him. They announced and sang his birth, and ministered to him in the wilderness. The eye of *Satan* was upon him. He watched him through life, hoping to make a prey of him, as he had done of the first Adam. But he was the Lord of heaven, and found nothing in him. The eyes of *men* were upon him. Simeon saw him, *blind* Bartimæus followed him. Judas followed him closely for three years, and Pilate saw him judicially. The centurion watched his death, and all the people gathered at the sight. The disciples saw the Lord after his resurrection and were glad. Paul saw him at mid-day. How many millions and millions have seen him since, not with the eye of sense, but of faith! In another world he is all in all—he draws every eye and employs every tongue *We shall see him as he is* [*Jay*].

Ver. 10. The reign of the Messiah is distinguished by three things. (1) *Enjoyment.* The very image of the vine and the fig-tree is delightful. (2) *Liberty.* Slaves and captives did not sit under their vines and fig-trees, nor did proprietors in time of war. (3) *Benevolence.* "Ye shall call every man," &c. There is no selfishness, no envy. All are anxious that others should partake of their privileges [*Jay*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Vers. 1—5. *Satan,* "the accuser of our brethren," (Rev. xii. 10). Accusation is the element of his being. He accuses God to men (cf. Gen. iii. 4, 5), and he accuses men to God (as in Job and in this passage). Hence his name in the N. T., *Diabolus,* from *diaballein* = to set at variance, namely, by slander,—a descriptive title quite as strong as the Hebrew term, Satan = opposer, the inherent and everlasting adversary of God and man, and of all that is good. In the end, the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ will be too much for the craft and malice of Satan. Still that malignant being opposes the truth, and leaves no stone unturned to turn away God's favour from his people, and thus overthrow the entire redemptive economy [*Lange*]. *Resist.* Against whom does Satan multiply his malicious assaults? Against those in whom God has multiplied his graces. He is too crafty a pirate to attack an empty vessel; he seeks to rob those vessels which are richly laden [*Wilson*].

Ver. 2. *Brand.* A poor Hindoo convert was once taunted by a European infidel, who asked him what Jesus had done for him. The Hindoo took a worm, put it inside a circle of dried leaves and grass, and set fire to them. When the fire approached the worm, he snatched it up and put it into his bosom, exclaiming, "That is what Jesus has done for me." I was once exposed to eternal fire. The flames had even touched me, and I was a scorched and blackened brand; when God in his matchless grace plucked me forth! [*Sacred Garland*].

Ver. 5. *Mitre.* Some act with their mitres as our kings and queens do with their crowns; they only put them on upon state occasions—do not wear them always, because they are too heavy. Christians, your state occasion should be always: you are always dear to Christ, and always near the Father's heart [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 7. *Keep.* Godliness is the highway to happiness; the good old way that hath ever been beaten by all those saints that now find rest to their souls [*Trapp*]. Consult duty, not events [*Annesley*]. Perish discretion when it interferes with duty [*H. More*].

> "Devotion when lukewarm is undevout"
> [*Young*].

Ver. 8. *Men of signs.* So were the primitive Christians. They were like so many pieces of immortality, dropped down from heaven, and tending thitherward—all full of God, and full of Christ, and full of heaven, and full of glory: and this world was nothing to them; trampled upon as a despicable, contemptible thing [*Howe*].

Ver. 9. *Stone.* The excellence of the foundation is for the building that rests on it. And so, whatever gives Christ value, so to speak, in the sight of God and angels—as the union in him of the glories and virtues of the two natures, Divine and human; his filial zeal, and perfect obedience, and efficacious atonement, and priestly intercession, and royal might and majesty—all, all redounds to the honour and blessing of "them that are Christ's" (1 Cor. xv. 23), through faith in his name [*Dr. Lillie*].

Iniquity. Christ, with his holy suffering, love, and perfect obedience, is the only one thing wherein God can have infinite pleasure, and for the sake of which he can look graciously on the race of men [*Dr. Heubner*].

Ver. 10. *Sit.* Mankind have always clung to the hope of better times of

the text. We give a passage from the famous Eclogue (iv.) of Virgil.

"The last great age, foretold by sacred rhyme,
Renews its finished course; Saturnian times
Roll round again; and mighty years, begun
From their first orb, in radiant circles run.
The base, degenerate, iron offspring ends,
A golden progeny from heaven descends. . . .
See, labouring nature calls thee to sustain
The nodding frame of heaven and earth and main!
See, to their base restored earth, seas, and air,
And joyful ages from behind in crowding ranks appear. [*Dryden's Virgil.*]

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The golden candlestick a symbol of the pure and prosperous state of the Jewish Church. **Waked**] Overpowered by what he had seen and heard, the prophet needed quickening into spiritual consciousness. **2. Candlestick**] or *chandelier*. Like the seven-branched golden candlestick in the tabernacle (Ex. xxv. 37: Ezek. xxv. 31); but this visionary candlestick is a designed enlargement. **Bowl**] *i. e.* can or round vessel for the oil. **Seven lamps**] united in one stem (Ex. xxv. 32). **Seven pipes**] Lit. *seven and seven*. Some say, seven and seven, *i. e.* fourteen; others, seven each for each lamp, *i. e.* forty-nine for the seven; this not impossible. The greater the number of oil pipes, the more brilliant the light. **3. Trees**] Supplying oil to the bowl. Explanation (vers. 12—14). **5. Knowest not**] No reproof of ignorance, though the vision might easily be mistaken, but a stimulus to inquiry. **No**] How candid the confession! **6. Might**] Lit. *army, power*. The work undertaken will be finished, not by human strength of any kind, but by the *Spirit* of God (cf. Hag. ii. 5). **7**] The resources of the Jewish leader were few, and the hindrances formidable, but the **great mountain**] will be depressed into a level plain, every obstacle removed, and the work completed. **Headstone**] Refers to the finishing of the structure. **Shoutings**] of acclamation. "The repetition of *favour* or grace is for the sake of intensity; and the ascriptions of this favour to the stone, implies that it was possessed of this quality, and was to be the medium of its conveyance to others. The prediction was clearly fulfilled in our Redeemer. '*Grace* or *favour* was poured through his lips'" [*Henderson*]. **9.**] Additional information. **Finish**] So he did, in the sixth year of Darius (Ezra vi. 15). **10. Day of small things**] "The short period which had elapsed since the Jews had begun to rebuild the temple, and the commencement which had been inconsiderable and inauspicious." **Who?**] with its negative answer, contains an admonition to the people and their rulers not to despise the small beginnings [*Keil*]. **Plummet**] With the human is strikingly contrasted Jehovah's estimate of the work. His eyes, which run to and fro, rejoiced when they saw **Zerubbabel** with the plummet in hand; a sign of work commenced, and superintending care. Zerubbabel is the type of a future Zerubbabel, the Messiah, who will build the temple of God. **11. What**] A question put three times, ver. 4), this, and ver. 12; varied at each time and at last minute. **Two olive trees**] Supposed to be the anointed priesthood and royalty by some (by others, the two Churches, the Jewish and Gentile), or "Christ's priesthood and monarchy—confirmed by vi. 13. Olives produce oil; oil supplies light to the candlestick, and all the oil of the Holy Spirit flows, by the medium of his Messiahship in its twofold functions of King and Priest, into the Candlestick of the Universal Church" [*Words.*]. **12. Branches**] Lit. *ears*, from resemblance to ears of grain. "As ears are full of grain, so olive-branches are full of olives." **Golden oil**] Gold-like liquor in brightness and purity. **13. Answered**] The angel is anxious to awaken attention. **14. Two anointed**] Lit. *sons of oil*, a symbol of Joshua and Zerubbabel, anointed and installed into office by oil; and of the royal and priestly office of Christ. **Stand**] The posture of servants waiting to receive orders from their masters. "If, then, the candlestick had two olive-trees by its side, yielding oil in such copious abundance, that every one of the seven lamps received its supply through seven pipes, it could never fail to have sufficient oil for a full and brilliant light. This was what was new in the visionary candlestick; and the meaning was this—that the Lord in future would bestow upon his congregation the organs of his Spirit, and maintain them in such direct connection with it, that it would be able to let its light shine with sevenfold brilliancy" [*Keil*].

HOMILETICS.

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH THE GOLDEN LIGHT-BEARER.—*Verses* 1—6.

In the former vision there was a display of the means and grounds of the forgiveness of sin. In this we have communications of grace, to conquer obstacles

and establish the work of God. The Church is symbolized by the candlestick. Streams of golden liquid flow into it from one centre, to feed and preserve the light. Without the aid of man, the oil is supplied freely and copiously to bless a sinful world. Notice—

I. The design of the Christian Church. To give light. It is created and constituted to be the light of the world. The world is spiritually dark: for "darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people." But truth, light, and life are found in the Church of God. 1. *Its light is diffusive.* All light is diffusive. The light in the Church must not be quenched nor "hid under a bushel." Individually and collectively, we must diffuse knowledge, holiness, and joy—shine forth for the benefit of men and the glory of God. 2. *Its light is borrowed.* It is only a *light-bearer*, not a creator of light. Like the moon, the Church shines with a borrowed light. She has no resources of her own, but depends upon Christ the Sun of Righteousness for every kind and degree of influence. If she forgets her end, neglects her mission, and disowns her dependence, her light may be extinguished. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." **II. The unity of the Christian Church.** The seven lamps may indicate its unity—one candlestick, but many branches; one body, but many members. All sections of Christians are united together in Christ the Head. All have their light and place, and in proportion as they are supplied with oil and diffuse the sanctifying influence of truth to others, do they answer the end of their own illumination (cf. Job xxv. 3: Phil. ii. 15). **III. The vitality of the Christian Church.** It was fed and sustained by virtues not its own. 1. *It was Divinely fed.* The lamps were not furnished with oil, nor kept by human agency. The two living olive-trees poured their oil into the central reservoir without the skill and labour of man. The Church thrives, and the cause of God triumphs, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." 2. *It was freely fed.* The oil spontaneously flowed from the olive-trees. Christ has received gifts for men, and from his priestly and regal offices they are freely bestowed upon the Church. "And of his fulness have all we received." **IV. The value of the Christian Church.** The candlestick was gold. Though few in number, obscure and imperfect in character, God's people are precious in his sight. They are his jewels, pure and indestructible. If they lose purity of life and doctrine they will tarnish their character and dim their lustre. "How is the gold become dim! how is the fine gold changed!" The preciousness depends upon the purity, and the responsibility upon the honour, of the Christian Church. "The king's daughter is all-glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold."

> "The purest treasure mortal times afford,
> Is—spotless reputation: That away,
> Men are but gilded loam, or painted clay" [*Shakspeare*].

Not by Might nor by Power—*Verse* 6.

"The vision was an embodied prophecy, intended in the first instance for the guidance and comfort of Zerubbabel." The prophet, and through him the people, are informed in their despondency of God's purpose and method concerning his work. They must not faint, but rely upon him, who is all-sufficient, and would preserve and furnish them with needful means to finish the work. "Not by might," &c. Take the words generally—

I. Not by might nor power in Christian life. Spiritual life is the direct act of God; "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." From beginning to end it is promoted by the Spirit of God. Carlyle speaks of "the almost omnipotent power of education," and others commend the refinements of life; but these do not satisfy conscience nor touch the heart. Men

are "saved by the renewing of the Holy Ghost." This is the doctrine of Scripture, and the characteristic of spiritual life. **II. Not by might nor by power in Christian work.** The temple was rebuilt not by the might of this world. God procured the edict of Cyrus, and touched the hearts of Darius and Artaxerxes. In the day of Pentecost, and at the Reformation, in the revivals and movements of the Church, we recognize the same truth. In the work of the Spirit, the redeeming energy of Christ and the agency of God are preserved through all generations. By the Holy Spirit the power of God is brought into the world. God has all hearts in his hand, and all agencies under his control. He inflames the zeal, inspires the prayers, and bestows the qualifications for the spread of his kingdom. We rely too much upon numbers, eloquence, and human agencies. The great want of the day is the Holy Spirit. If we depend upon him, then however few and feeble in effort, the progress of the work will never be impeded. Systems founded by power and spread by force will come to nought. "All they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword." God's presence must be sought, and his power trusted. Then, when human means are hidden, and the might of the Spirit enjoyed, all the glory will be given to him.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 1, 2. The weary and sleepy prophet. 1. *Indicative of Christian weakness.* Believers are mortal, cannot long bear up in spiritual duties, and often astonished by wonderful revelations in hard times (cf. Daniel's sleep, ch. x, 9; and Peter's at the Transfiguration, Luke ix. 32). 2. *A type of all who stand unconsciously, and live carelessly, in the presence of God and great events.* There is a lethargy of soul in the whole sphere of Divine realities; and men try to live indifferent to, or entirely without, the light and friendly visitations of God. 3. *A proof of God's goodness in rousing men to duty.* We require stirring up in natural indolence and spiritual weakness, to reap the benefit of Divine instruction; and when the revelations are given, we do not understand them. "The angel that talked with me came again." "He wakeneth morning by morning; he wakeneth mine ear to hear, as the learned."

Vers. 2, 3. Observe the candlestick is golden, and the oil is called golden. The Church must be pure and holy; what she teaches must be pure and holy also; not adulterated with the admixture of any novel doctrines; such as those which have been added by some to the faith once delivered to the saints, and imposed as necessary to salvation [*Wordsworth*].

Vers. 4, 5. *An apt pupil and a wonderful teacher.* I. *The pupil.* The prophet — 1. *Not ashamed to confess his ignorance.* Ignorance may be wilful, but criminal when it can be removed. "Knowest thou not," &c., as much as to say that he ought to know (cf. John iii. 10). Its removal difficult. We may search and attend, yet not properly understand. The prophet was warned, and took heed to the angel, but required further teaching. 2. *Sought to be instructed by asking questions.* "The prophet pretends to no knowledge which he does not possess. Let us imitate the twofold example; both that of *inquisitiveness* and that of *ingenuousness.* Let us be on the alert in our inquiries after knowledge; and in order to our acquiring it, never foolishly, and to save our pride or vanity, affect to have what we have not" [*Wardlaw*]. II. *The Teacher*, the angel. Notice—1. *His method*, by asking counter-questions; to excite, quicken, and suggest. This is Socratic and Christ-like. The wisdom of ancient philosophers, and the teaching of Jesus, have come to us in dialogue forms. 2. *His willingness.* The pupil was eager and earnest, the teacher was able and willing. "There are many," says one, "whose ignorance clings to them because they are unwilling to confess it, and so to forsake it; whilst, on the other hand, there are others who are as reluctant to

drop a word of wisdom from their lips, as a miser is to surrender a guinea from his purse." If not taught by angels, be thankful for the Bible and the Holy Spirit. 3. But the *degree* of information was not great. Explanations were reserved, and the pupil had to ask again (cf. vers. 12 and 13). Enough was given to him for present duty, and this must be communicated to the people. One revelation only prepares for another, and by giving what we know, we increase our own stock of learning. "He that watereth others shall himself be watered."

HOMILETICS.

Divine Grace the Source of all Strength.—*Verses* 7—10.

The resources of the Jewish leader were few, and dangers formidable, hence the promise of help. The beginning may be small and discouraging, but the co-operation of the Holy Spirit will ensure success. Joshua and Zerubbabel shall finish the work, and bring forth the copestone amid the loud shouts of the people—"Grace, grace unto it."

I. The work was carried on under the Divine auspices. The leaders do their part, but it is "with those seven" eyes (ch. iii. 9), "the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth." God watched the foundation, and was ever present to superintend. Nothing took him by surprise or happened unknown. In all parts of the earth his people are defended and guided by his providence. "The Divine eye is ever in union with the Divine arm," says a writer; "the *knowledge* of God with his *power*." Under his inspection the work must prosper. He takes cognizance of all creatures, inspires and directs all efforts. Those that have the plummet in hand can do nothing without him, should seek his presence, and depend upon his help. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." **II. The difficulties were overcome by Divine help.** Difficulties there were, manifold and great, in the people themselves and outside them. 1. *Some despised the work.* Circumstances were disheartening, made them sigh and desist. They were few in number, and the work in proportion to their means very great. "Who hath despised the day of small things?" 2. *Powerful enemies opposed the work.* They were artful, malignant, and often successful. Like great mountains, impassable and immovable, they stood in the way. But the mountains were levelled down, difficulties vanished away, and all became a plain. "Thou shalt thresh the mountains," when engaged for God (Isa. xli. 15). To despond is faithless and guilty. Nothing can resist God. The victories of his word are sure. "Every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked be made straight, and the rough places plain." **III. The work was finished amid joyful acclamations of Divine praise.** "He shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." The people wished well to the building, and prayed that it might stand for ever. The finishing of the temple was a type of the work of God in all ages. The Jewish builder represented Christ, the Divine architect of the spiritual temple. His work begun by grace should end by grace. Amid opposition it is carried on and will be finished. Soon the plaudits of men and angels shall shout in acclamation and acknowledgment of the multiplied favour of God. Grace, free grace, shall be the theme of their song! "Grace, grace unto it."

Despising the Day of Small Things—*Verse* 10.

The Jews are reproved for their heartlessness and unbelief. They should not estimate God's work by present appearances. Their progress though small is an earnest of great and glorious success. To despair when God has promised help, is to doubt his faithfulness, power, and omniscience. These words declare—

I. A fact in history. 1. "*The day of small things.*" This, notwithstanding

great toil and much time spent in the work of God. In Jewish history and in the present time—in the Sunday School and in the Christian Church—in philanthropic and missionary enterprise, it is the day of small things. Though success may be realized, yet it is small in itself; small in comparison with what might be, and with what will be. 2. *Let us learn a lesson.* To be humble, because we have done so little and been so idle. To be more prayerful; "O Lord, revive thy work." To depend more upon God. "Not by might, nor by power." **II. A tendency in our nature.** Contempt for small beginnings in religious matters has been a common feeling. Sanballat despised the work of Nehemiah (ch. iv. 2). Christianity "was despised and rejected of men," in the person of its founder and his apostles. Missionaries, religious institutions and societies, have been ridiculed in their feeble beginnings. Why does this happen? "Because," says Foster, "we do not apprehend the preciousness of what is good, in any, even the smallest thing—we know not what is requisite to be previously done, to bring the small beginning into existence We are apt to set far too high a price on our own efforts, as estimated against their results; and then there is the impiety of not duly recognizing the supremacy of God." **III. A reproof from God.** "'Who hath despised?" How unreasonable and foolish in the present circumstances. "Our duty," said Spinosa, "is neither to ridicule the affairs of men, nor to deplore, but simply to understand them." It becomes no one, least of all a believer, to deride a small beginning, and think despondingly of the work of God. This conduct is foolish. 1. *Because there are no little things really.* Appearances deceive. We see not the connection, the beginning and the end of things. "All are links of one vast chain." 2. *Because great things spring from what appear little things.* In nature, we have mighty forests from smallest seeds, and broad rivers from tiny streamlets. It is "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." In history, we have great results from small beginnings. The Bible and missionary societies are illustrations. The law of providence and the gospel of Christ teach the same truth. A little leaven hid in the meal affects the mass; the grain of mustard becomes a mighty tree; and the handful of corn on the bleak mountain-top yields a waving harvest like the fruitful Lebanon. Despise not, despair not. The work will and must be finished. What, then, will be the end of those who help not, but deride and hinder its accomplishment? "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 7. *Great mountain.* Mighty enemies despised, subdued, and rendered subservient to the cause of God. "A mountain is spoken of in Scripture emblematically, to denote the greatest difficulties and oppositions of men to cross any design; and the overturning or levelling of these mountains expresseth the highest actings of the power of God, in subduing all difficulties and oppositions for the good of his people" [*Caryl*].

Vers. 8, 9. 1. The promises of the Word are faithful and worthy of confidence — their repetition indicates our distrust, but God's readiness to perform. 2. It is a special favour to a people when God grants them reformation, power to build a habitation for his name, and to finish their work. 3. When this work is finished, it is a proof of Christ's unchangeable love and care, and should be rightly studied as revealing the character of God. *Thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me* [cf. *Hutcheson.*]

The whole drift of this chapter might be summed up in the words of Jesus to his disciples, "*Have faith in God!*" and the encouragement that was held out to the Jewish builders, is held out to us. We have, *first of all*, what should ever be enough to inspire confidence, though it stood alone—independent of all information as to the way in which the work was to be effected by him— we

have *the express and explicit promise of Jehovah*, that the building shall be finished; and that before the obedient and prayerful efforts of his people the greatest — the most apparently insurmountable — obstacles give way. We have more than the bare word of promise: the assurance of *the incessantly attentive superintendence and watchful care of his ever-present providence*. The "seven eyes of the Lord run to and fro" to help. Still further, we have the promise of *the constant and copious effusion of the Holy Spirit*. The might and power of man are pronounced altogether incompetent, and this Divine influence is promised. This was true in the existing case. Faith, fortitude, energy, and perseverance were needful, and supplied by the Spirit in leaders and people. It is true in a peculiar sense of the *spiritual* temple. The *stones* must be prepared, and no energy but God's can make them *living stones*. Even all legitimate and zealous effort must prove fruitless, unless God give his influence with them. But *having* the promise, we need never despond. As the ancient Church was animated to look with confidence for the accomplishment of the glorious things awaiting her; so let us look forward to the great results promised to us [*Wardlaw*].

Ver. 10. When good men despise the day of small things, the grand essential of religion, *faith*, is wanting. They lack faith in the unerring *wisdom* of the Divine scheme and determinations; faith in the *goodness* of God, the absolute certainty that infinite wisdom and power cannot be otherwise than good; faith in the *promises* of God, that his servants shall, in the *succession* of their generations, see his cause advance from the small to the great, though this be not granted to any *one* separately; that their labours shall, each in their turn, be approved and recorded; and that they shall at last exult in the glorious consummation [*John Foster*]. We ought not to despise the day of small things, because— 1. such conduct tends to prevent its becoming a day of great things; 2. angels do not despise it, but rejoice over every one repenting sinner; 3. our Saviour does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; 4. God does not despise it, but noticed even some good thing found in the son of Jeroboam; 5. the day of small things is the commencement of great things [*Payson*].

HOMILETICS.

The Golden Candlestick.—*Verses* 11—14.

The candlestick of pure gold represented the Church of God. There is always some distinctive peculiarity between the material emblem and the spiritual reality; a *seeming* incongruity which is in reality a distinguishing glory, *e. g.* "a lamb in the midst of the throne;" so here, such a candlestick was never seen except in vision. The lamps in the temple were supplied by the priests in the ordinary way, but *this* in a supernatural way. The mystery was explained to the prophet as representing Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the prince, who were endued with the Holy Spirit, and raised up to rule, intercede, and build up the temple. All authority and success depended upon God; they were acknowledged as a *combined* and eminent type of Jesus Christ, who is priest upon the throne, builds the spiritual temple, and who alone shall bear the glory.

I. The seat of spiritual light. The Church contains the knowledge, holiness, and consolation to be found in this sinful world. Worldly men are strangers to this light; wander carelessly into error and destruction; and even the wisest and most diligent never discovered a light sufficient to guide them aright. This light is not inherent, or all would have it alike, as the light of conscience and reason. Not merely the light of the old dispensation, but the light of the glorious gospel, **which is *fixed in this Church*, which there diffuses satisfaction, direction, and**

holiness. Its rays thrown around, invite and attract the world; but they must come into the Church to enjoy it. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. **II. The source of spiritual light.** It comes from the Lord Jesus, its glorious source, in whom all fulness dwells. The Holy Spirit is the oil of gladness, resting on Christ, and freely given by him to his Church. It is supplied not by any natural or artificial means, as the oil in the vision was not pressed from the olive, nor poured into the lamps by the help of man; but flowed spontaneously, abundantly, constantly, from a living source—so the communication of Divine grace from Christ, the living spring. **III. The communication of light.** It is by means of a golden candlestick. 1. This may apply:—*First*, to the glorious doctrines of the gospel, by which the light of the knowledge of God is displayed in Jesus Christ. *Second*, to the ordinances of the gospel, by which light and consolation are dispensed in the Church, and which attract the notice of the world. Seven branches turning every way, all lit. Christ so places his word, ordinances, and ministers, that no part of the Church is destitute of life, and that the whole will shine as the light of the world. *Third*, to the character of the saints, shining in the effulgence of holiness; "ye are the light of the world" (cf. Isa. lx. 1). 2. Whether allusion be to either or all of these, the emblem will apply—a golden candlestick. *First*, formed of valuable material. The doctrines and ordinances of the gospel are more precious than gold: the law of thy mouth is better than thousands of gold and silver. The *saints*, precious sons of Zion, are comparable to fine gold. The candlestick is formed by *infinite skill*, and wrought with most exquisite workmanship. *Second*, gold denotes brightness, purity, splendour, and glory. What refulgent purity in the doctrines, in the ordinances of the gospel, and in the lives of consistent Christians! *Third*, gold denotes durability. It is an indestructible metal. Lead can be melted until wasted away; but gold, expose it to what heat you may, retains its weight, loses nothing by alloy, and escapes uninjured. The doctrines of the gospel, the Church, and the characters of holiness in saints, are incorruptible; shall endure to the end of the world, and never be consumed, by persecution or hell itself. In closing—1. We are led to admire the wonderful provision of Divine grace. Worldly men *despise* our secret communications and deride our expectations, and we ourselves *wonder* how supplies come. But the mysterious olive pours in its rich abundance. 2. We see the reason why the gospel and the Church live in spite of opposition. They depend upon a living source. Earth and hell cannot cut the golden pipes, or turn aside the stream. 3. We are reminded that no human power or effort can do good to men, except the Holy Spirit works by them. But the Spirit works by the meanest instrument, and needs not the countenance of mighty monarchs, or the aid of learning and oratory. The excellency of the power is his own. 4. We are taught to distinguish between grace and the gospel. The oil is distinct from the pipes, though conveyed through them. Ordinances are but *pipes and means*, not to be rested in; yet *golden pipes*, very valuable, and employed to convey the blessing Pray for a rich supply of the Holy Spirit [*The New Evangelist*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 12—14.; 1. The question (ver. 12); 2. the confession (ver. 13); 3. the answer (ver. 14). The angel returned no answer (only asked a question) to the question of the prophet, to invite closer attention, and prompt a more definite question [cf. *Pusey*].

Ver. 14. *Two anointed ones.* Blessed in themselves, and the means of blessing others—empty themselves (ver. 12). The unction of the Holy One must abide in us before we can furnish grace to others (cf. John iii. 20—27). "Joshua and Zerubbabel shadowed forth what was united in Christ, and so in their several offices they might be included in the

symbol of the olive-tree. They could not exhaust it; for men who, having served God in their generation, were to pass away, could not be alone intended in a vision, which describes the abiding existence of the Church. Christ is both High Priest and Eternal King. In both ways he supplies to us the light which he brought. From him flow unceasingly piety and righteousness to the Church, and it never lacks the heavenly light. The oil is expressed into tubes; thence passed through tubes, into the vessel which contains the lamps: to designate the various suppliers of light, which, the nearer they are to the effluence of the oil, the more they resemble him by whom they are appointed to so Divine an office. The seven lamps are the manifest Churches, distinct in place, but most closely bound together by the consent of one faith, and by the bond of charity. For although the Church is one, yet it is distinct according to the manifold variety of nations. But the lamps are set in a circle, that the oil of one may flow more readily into others and it, in turn, may receive from others their superabundance, to set forth the communion of love and the indissoluble community of faith" [*Pusey*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IV.

Vers. 1—4. *Candlestick.* All human souls, never so bedarkened, love light; light once kindled spreads till all is luminous [*Carlyle*]. We are all naturally ambitious to shine in the world. It is the foible of our race; but the fault lies not in the passion itself, but in mistaking the sphere and choosing improper objects. Many are proud to shine in the lustre of pomp, the elegance of dress, or the splendour of equipage; others again are ambitious of the voice of fame, or the acquisition of power. To such as act by the opinion of the world alone, fashion is above all other laws. They study nothing but appearance. This object absorbs other appetites, passions, principles, and duties. But religion alone will teach from what principle, in what manner, and by what means to shine [*Baseley*].

Vers. 4, 5. *What?* Conviction of ignorance is the door-step to the temple of wisdom [*Spurgeon*]. Compare thyself with those that are more learned or wise than thyself, and then thou wilt see matter to keep thee humble [*Sir Mt. Hale*]. Ask the reason "Why?" [*Arkwright*].

> "Ignorance is the curse of God;
> Knowledge the wing wherewith we fly to heaven" [*Shakespeare*].

Vers. 6, 7. *Power.* Dependence gives God his proper glory. It is the peculiar honour and prerogative of Deity to have a world of creatures hanging upon it—staying themselves upon it; to be the fulcrum, the centre of a lapsing creation [*Howe*].

Ver. 10. *Despised.* To a decidedly irreligious contemner, we might say, "Beware what you do;" for "if the thing be of God," you are daring *him* by your contempt. If there be something of his spirit and power contained and acting in things, it is not safe to make free with them in the way of scorn, however inconsiderable in magnitude they may seem. It may *one* day (not "a day of small things" *that*) be a question, not of rebuke, but of judgment. On that day will not be forgotten a contempt of the introductory littleness (say, rather, undisclosed dignity) of what God had determined to advance to greatness and glory [*John Foster*].

Ver. 11. *Olive.* No tree is more frequently mentioned by ancient authors, nor more highly honoured by ancient nations. By the Greeks it was dedicated to Minerva, and even employed in crowning Jove, Apollo, and Hercules, as well as emperors, philosophers, and orators, and all whom the people delighted to honour. By the Romans also it was highly honoured. Columella describes it as "*the chief of trees.*" It is not wonderful that almost all the ancient authors, from the time of Homer, so frequently mention it, and that, as

Horace says, to win it seemed the sole aim men had in life [*Carm.* i. 7]. See Tristam, *Nat. Hist. of the Bible*; Thomson, *Ld. and Bk.*

Ver. 14. *Two.* Christ's witnesses, in remarkable times of the Church, have appeared in pairs; as Moses and Aaron the inspired civil and religious authorities; Caleb and Joshua; Ezekiel the priest and Daniel the prophet; Zerubbabel and Joshua (cf. Rev. xi. 3, 4) [*D. Brown, D.D.*].

CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Flying roll**] Vision sixth. **2.**] Ten yards long and five yards broad. **The size** intended to indicate the number of curses contained; and **Flying**] The velocity of judgments upon the wicked. **3. Earth**] Land of Judah first; ultimately, to all the earth. **Stealeth**] Sinners against the second commandment, false swearers against the first. **Cut off**] Lit. cleared, swept away as offensive (1 Kings xiv. 10: Ezek. xxiv. 11). Two sins put for the whole. **This side—that side**] The scroll was written on both sides, as in Ex. xxxii. 15. *Henderson* gives: "From that place, whether on the right hand or on the left, he should be swept away by the Divine judgment. Nowhere should he find protection." **4. Forth**] Out of the treasure-house (Jer. x. 13). **Enter and remain**] Lit. lodge or stay; not idle, but consuming inmates, beams, and stones (cf. 1 Kings xviii. 38 Lev. xiv. 45). **5.**] Seventh vision. Wickedness driven from Judah to mingle with its kindred elements in Babylon. **6. Ephah**] A familiar dry measure, denoting unjust dealings in buying and selling (cf. Amos viii. 5). **Resemblance**] Lit. *eye* (*i. e.* that to which the eye was directed, their aim, viz. evil, some). The ephah was an image of the wickedness of the Jews in the land. **7. Lifted**] The ephah was covered. **Talent**] Lit. a round piece of metal, 125 lbs. weight. **A woman**] In miniature, perhaps; Lit. *one* woman personified *wickedness* (cf. Prov. ii. 16; v. 3, 4). Lit the wickedness in its peculiar form. **8. Cast**] it within; caused her to contract herself within the compass of the vessel [*Newc.*]. Wickedness had risen up, but was cast down again, and sealed up in the ephah. **The weight**] Lit. the stone, round mass of lead, to secure her. No escape from judgments. **9. Two women**] removed the ephah with its contents. One not enough to carry the load [*Maurer*]. The Assyrians and Babylonians, by whom God removed idolatry in the persons of apostate Jews out of the land [*Henderson*]. **Wings**] like storks' wings, strong and ample. **Wind**] To represent the swiftness of movement, flying before instead of struggling against wind [*Wardlaw*]. **Lifted**] up above hindrance and earthly power. **11. Build**] a permanent habitation. **Shinar**] An old historic name for Babylon (Gen. x. 10: Isa. xi. 11: Dan. i. 2). Wickedness is to be punished by another exile, longer than the former one. **Established**] Wickedness cast out of Judah, will dwell long and firmly, but not permanently, in Babylon; a type of the final separation of the ungodly from the godly in time and eternity.

HOMILETICS.

THE UNCHANGING LAW AND ITS UNIVERSAL CURSE.—*Verses* 1—4.

The series of visions now take another turn. In the two preceding chapters we have the elements of the gospel, in the destruction of Zion's foes, the forgiveness of the people, the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and the finishing of the temple. Now we learn that God is holy, and cannot tolerate sinners in their wickedness—that all who remain impenitent or reject God's mercy will be punished with a long and dreary exile, or visited with exterminating judgment. "The white robes of innocence and the golden oil of the Holy Spirit disappear, and in their place comes a fearful curse, overshadowing the land and threatening an irrecoverable overthrow" [*Lange*]. We learn from the connection of these words—

I. That God's law is not abrogated by change of circumstances. The Jews were restored to their land, forgiven in their sins, and aided in their work; but

the law of God still observed, and would punish, their guilt. No place, time, nor circumstances can alter this law. It is "from eternity to eternity." It is the revelation of God, and the standard of rectitude in all nations and ages. Unchangeable in its nature, demands, and design, it is designed to educate conscience, to keep alive a sense of sin, and to lead to repentance and faith. "The law entered (came in by the way, *i. e.* provisionally, with the foreseen effect) that the offence might abound." **II. That the curse of God's law will come upon all transgressors.** "This is the curse that goeth forth." There is a constant tendency in men to abuse Divine goodness, and encourage sin. But to all who see, the "flying roll" unfolds the knowledge of God. It is still a "fiery law," pronouncing curses on those who disobey. Sinai still thunders forth its terrors to all who in spirit, word, or deed break its principles. They lay hold upon all, and where is the man that can escape? "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." **III. That Divine grace alone will secure a man from the curse of God's law.** The Jews were reminded that sin would hinder their work—that they were to forsake it, if God must continue to help them, and fix them in their own land. In other words, God's favour alone would be the ground of their security. *They* are only safe who trust his mercy and obey his will. "The lesson under a different form," says *Wardlaw*, "was also, that the land to which they had been restored, must be held *by the same tenure as before.* God had given it originally *by promise.* By faith of the promise it was obtained. By 'the obedience of faith' it was held. The inheritance was never 'of the law;' was never held by any *legal tenure*—by any kind of *desert*—any *right* arising out of the doings of those who occupied it." Only in Christ are we free from condemnation. We are saved by grace, not by works. "Not of works, lest any man should boast."

The Flying Roll, or Sin and its Punishment.—*Verses* 1—4.

Taking this roll as representing the curse of God, ready to be executed upon transgressors, let us "lift up our eyes and behold" the sins which bring the curse, and provoke God to ruin men in personal and domestic affairs.

I. **The sins.** Some infer the Divine authority of the roll, from its size, just the dimensions of the temple porch, a place where the law was usually read; others infer, the great number of the sins and curses written upon it. Like Ezekiel's roll "it was written within and without," and full of "lamentations, and mourning, and woe." 1. *The sins were grievous.* Two kinds are specified as indicating the whole. (*a*) *Sins against man.* "Every one that stealeth." This means every kind of injustice and violence. (*b*) *Sins against God.* "Every one that sweareth." False or profane swearing was common among the Jews. Stealing and perjury often together; for the covetous and fraudulent have no scruple in the use of God's name (cf. Prov. xxx. 9). Innumerable methods of fraud and deceit are constantly practised, and scarcely considered criminal, because customary. But all who are guilty of injustice and dishonesty with their neighbours in whatever form, and all who withhold from God, in principle and action, the reverence due to his name, are under the curse of the law. 2. *The sins were open.* They were not only written on the roll, but the roll was *open*, and of extraordinary size. "It was not rolled up and sealed, but fully expanded to view, that nothing it contained might be concealed," says one. Sins are written legibly on our moral constitution, in the sight of God and man, and are "known and read of all men." Sin is self-revealing. It is impossible to hide wrong-doing. Jupiter was supposed to write down the sins of men in a book. God keeps a record of human guilt, which will be unfolded on earth and in eternity. "Some men's sins are open (manifest, clear,) beforehand, going (like heralds) before to judgment; and some men they follow after." **II. The**

punishment. "This is the curse that goeth forth." The curse of the Divine law must be denounced against all transgressors. Its sanction must be set forth and not erased. The theology which denies Divine justice, and deludes the conscience, finds no place in the teaching of the prophet. "The anathemas of Scripture are not a mere *brutum fulmen*, but a solid and terrible reality." 1. The curse *was universal.* "Every one shall be cut off." It hangs over "the face of the whole earth," ready to fall upon its objects. 2. The curse *was inevitable.* "I will bring it forth, saith the Lord." Who can turn aside that which Almighty power sends forth? On "this side, and on that," the ungodly are "cut off." 3. The curse *was swift.* Its speed was not slow: "I see a *flying* roll." Judgments sleep not, but suddenly break forth, and overtake the disobedient. The lightning from heaven is not more swift and irresistible. "He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly." 4. The curse *was destructive.* It penetrated the house, and consumed everything inside, like the plague of old. "It shall enter into the house." (*a*) *It destroys families.* The homes of the thief and the false-swearer were attacked. The curse of God comes to the sinner where he thinks himself most protected and most secure. (*b*) *It destroys possessions.* Vengeance enters and remains in the house until it answers the end for which it is sent. It "remains in the midst of it;" abides like leprosy, infecting, wasting, and consuming all. Ahab multiplied his house, and defied the curse pronounced against it; but the stroke swept all away (1 Kings xxi. 20—22). "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but he blesseth the habitation of the just."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. Prophecies partly appertain to those in whose times the sacred writers prophesied, partly to the mysteries of Christ. And therefore it is wont of the prophets, at one time to chastise vices and set forth punishments; at another, to predict the mysteries of Christ and the Church [*Aug. de Civ. Dei*]. It was a wide, unfolded roll, as is involved in its *flying;* but its flight signified the very swift coming of punishment; its flying from heaven, that the sentence came from the judgment-seat above [*Pusey*].

Ver. 2. Its large *size* might denote *two* things: — the large number and amount of the Divine denunciations it contained; and at the same time, there being room for writing them large, that they might be seen. It was at the same time "*flying.*" By which, also, two things might be denoted—that it was not meant for any particular city or locality, but to make a progress through the length and breadth of the land; and also, that the denunciations of Jehovah written in it would come speedily and surely on those against whom they were pointed [*Wardlaw*].

Ver. 3. *Cut off:* lit. *cleansed away.* The moral meaning of the Hebrew word suggests, the defiling and offensive nature of sin, and the several measures necessary to take it away. "None who enter the porch of the visible Church may flatter themselves that they can escape God's wrath and malediction, if they commit any of the sins condemned by the comprehensive commination of this flying roll, which may be compared to a net, co-extensive with the world, and drawn throughout the whole from side to side" [*Wordsworth*].

Ver. 4. A man's house is termed his castle, but is unable to hold out against Divine judgments, which may be noticed —1. for terribleness; 2. suddenness; and 3. retributive end. Property and estates often cut off, families dried up root and branch, and doomed to perpetual curse (cf. Job xviii. 14, 15). "It is a curse that embitters every sweet, and gives more than twofold intensity to every bitter. From this world it must accompany and follow a man to another, and settle with him there for ever. The special reference made to their houses, with the stones thereof and the timber thereof,

forcibly points to the care which they had been taking of their own accommodation, in comfort and elegance, while *Jehovah's house* was neglected" [*Ward law*].

HOMILETICS.

The Woman in the Ephah, or the Wickedness and Punishment of the Nation.—*Verses* 5—11.

The scope of this vision is not much indicated by the angel, and is differently interpreted by commentators. In the former vision, God pursues personal sins with private calamities; in this, the nation fills up the measure of its iniquity, and is cast out of its land. Taking *the woman* as representing the Jewish nation—the Church of God, and *the ephah*—the wickedness, the corruption in which the nation had fallen; we have a prophetic warning or denunciation for the future. The two visions, distinct in form, are allied in meaning and purpose.

I. The wickedness of the nation. "This is an ephah that goeth forth." *Dr. Henderson* regards the *wickedness* as meaning "*idolatry* with all its accompanying atrocities." *Wardlaw* and others take *the ephah* as an emblem of worldly *traffic* or *merchandise*. This traffic was mixed up with fraud and treachery, and the ground of complaint and expostulation. 1. *The wickedness was universal.* "This is their resemblance through all the land." "Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation" (cf. Mal. iii. 9). 2. *This wickedness was deeply rooted.* The woman is represented as *sitting in* the ephah. Worldliness dwells in the Church. "The love of this present world" leads many astray. 3. *This wickedness was measured.* The ephah was gradually filled, and every one contributed to the full measure. All helped to make the heap, and ripen the nation for judgment. Sin was a common store, Divinely permitted and exactly measured (cf. Gen. xv. 16). "Fill ye up the measure of your fathers" (Matt. xxiii. 32). **II. The punishment of the nation.** The nation was shut up with its sins in the measure; enclosed so that they could not escape; and carried where the retribution begins, but does not seem to end. 1. *The nation was carried away.* They might be permitted to build and work for God, but if they heeded not the warning, they would be *lifted up* out of their land, and dispersed to other countries. 2. *The nation was openly carried away.* "They lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven." The punishment was before the eyes of all, a public example of God's vengeance to the world. 3. *The nation was carried away by suitable agencies.* Whatever the *two women* represent, they are set forth as agents, swift and sufficient, to execute the Divine purpose, without let or hindrance. "Rapidly, inexorably, irresistibly, they flew and bore the ephah between heaven and earth. No earthly power could reach or rescue it" [*Pusey*]. 4. *The nation was carried away to an appointed place.* "In the land of Shinar." Babylon was an emblem of restored and repeated captivity. A place which symbolizes the anti-christian or ungodly powers, who by violence, art, and falsehood war against the truth. 5. *The punishment of the nation in this appointed place would be of long duration.* "The building of a house" for the ephah, and "the setting of it on its own base," represent the long duration of the second dispersion. For two thousand years the Jews have remained a distinct people in a scattered state, a proof of God's faithfulness, and a warning to all nations. Unjust measures, whatever they be, will bring righteous retribution upon their possessors. The instrument of defrauding God and man will become the agent of punishment. Sinners will be driven away in their own wickedness, and sent to their "own place." Let us seek our portion with the true Israel, and avoid the curse of Babylon's doom. "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (cf. Rev. xvii. 3—5).

"Tribes of the wandering foot and weary breast,
How shall ye flee away and be at rest?
The wild dove hath her nest, the fox his cave,
Mankind their country—Israel but the grave!" [*Lange*]

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 6. *This* is equivalent to *see*, there is a woman, &c. The strokes of punitive wrath do not fall at random or capriciously. There is ample reason in every case, so that one may always say, this (the ephah) is their object in all the land. Men go ceaselessly adding sin to sin, and, because judgment is not suddenly executed, think that there is impunity; whereas they are only filling the measure. God waits. There is an appointed time with him, and he will not anticipate [*Lange*]. We too are taught by this, that the Lord of all administers all things *in weight and measure*. So foretelling to Abraham that his seed should be a sojourner, and the cause thereof—"for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full," *i. e.* they have not yet committed sins enough (Gen. xv. 16) to merit entire destruction, wherefore I cannot yet endure to give them over to the slaughter, but will wait for the measure of their iniquity [*Pusey*].

The ephah may therefore represent—1. *The sins of the people.* Every one contributing to fill up the measure. 2. *Their ripeness for Divine judgment.* The measure filled up. 3. *The just retribution of their punishment.* "The unjust measure was one of Judah's leading sins, and thus, in just retribution, their punishment."

Ver. 6. They who had dealt treacherously with others, were dealt treacherously with themselves. What measure men mete to others, God metes to themselves (Isa. xxi. 2; xxxiii. 1) [*Fausset*].

Ver. 8. *Lead on the mouth of it.* The ephah was covered, and the heavy lid of lead carefully put down upon the mouth of it. This is a significant emblem of the *impossibility of escape* from the merited judgments of God. So the Jewish people, considered conditionally, as retaining their character, would be carried away *in their worldliness*, as the woman was borne in the ephah. The very ephah, the instrument of their merchandise and wealth, is represented as the means of confinement; so does the worldly-mindedness, the ambition, and covetousness of the Jewish people *shut them up* to retributive vengeance [*Wardlaw*].

Vers. 9—11. 1. A people abusing afflictions and marvellous deliverances from it, by sinning yet more, may expect their afflictions to be returned upon them with harder measure; for a new and sorer captivity, and longer dwelling under it, is here threatened upon renewed provocations. 2. The Lord hath sufficient instruments at command to execute his judgments, who, being employed against his sinful people, shall find all things concurring with them in their work; *two women* enough to carry the ephah; *wings*, enabling them to flee and do their work violently and swiftly; high *in heaven and earth*, above the opposition of men; and *wind in their wings*, to indicate providence helping them forward. 3. Captivity and exile in profane nations, from the face of God, and the society of one another in his ordinances, is one of the sorest judgments by which the Lord plagues his Church; *wickedness is carried to the land of Shinar.* 4. As the Church is no place for sin to reign and get a biding habitation; so enemies to the Church are accounted by God as the common sink of wickedness, whom he will punish; for wickedness is carried from the holy land to *Shinar*, its own place, where all wickedness dwelt, from which the Jews might gather that, as he punished them so he would not spare their enemies [*Hutcheson*]. The prophet intimates to the Jews of his own age, that if they sin against God by the sins here mentioned, their restoration to Jerusalem is

frustrate and abortive; they are not, in heart, in Zion, the city of peace, but in Babel, the city of confusion; and though they may pride themselves in building a city and temple at Jerusalem, yet their own proper place, where their own house is built, is the land of Shinar [*Wordsworth*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER V.

Ver. 3. *Curse.* The good make a better bargain, and the bad a worse, than is usually supposed, for the rewards of the one, and the punishments of the other, not unfrequently begin on this side of the grave [*Colton's Laconics*]. The wages that sin bargains with the sinner are—life, pleasure, and profit; but the wages it pays them with are—death, torment, and destruction. He that would understand the falsehood and death of sin, must compare its promises and payments together [*South*].

"Our pleasant vices make instruments to scourge us" [*Shakespeare*].

Ver. 7. *Behold.* The angel bids him behold the sins of the people Israel; heaped together in a perfect measure, and the transgression of all fulfilled—that the sins which escaped notice, one by one, might, when collected together, be laid open to the eyes of all, and Israel might go forth from its place, and it might be shown to all what she was in her own land [*Pusey*].

Ver. 8. *Lead.* Iniquity, as with a talent of lead, weighs down the conscience [*St. Ambrose*]. Escape is contrary to the laws of God and God's universe. It is as impossible as that fire should not burn, or water run uphill. Your sins are killing you by inches; all day long they are sowing in you the seeds of disease and death [*Canon Kingsley*].

Vers. 9—11. This vision, like the other visions of Zechariah, extends to Christian times. In the Christian Church universal corruptions have arisen which may find a solemn warning here. The Church of Rome boasts herself to be Sion: but she is the mystical Babylon of the Apocalypse. Her sovereign pontiff is "the lawless one" of St. Paul (2 Thess. ii. 3—12). This prophecy may be applied, and ought to be applied, as a warning to those who are tempted to communicate with her in her errors and corruptions. Her doom will be, to be removed from her place, and to be swept away by the whirlwind of God's wrath, because she rebels against his will and word [*Wordsworth*].

CHAPTER VI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Chariots**] Symbolic of four great empires described (Dan. ii. 31—43; vii. 3—7): or of the four winds of heaven (ver. 5). **Two mountains**] Between Moriah and Zion, some; others, emblems of Medes and Persians, corresponding to the two horns (Dan. viii. 34). **Brass**] Strength and solidity (cf. Jer. i. 18). **2. Red**] The colours indicate the character of the dispensations. *Red*, a symbol of cruelty, war, and bloodshed. **Black**] of calamity and sorrow. **White**] of prosperity and gladness. **Grisled and bay**] or *piebald*, of a mixed dispensation, light and darkness, prosperity and adversity. **5. Angel**] explains. **Spirits**] (*winds*, marg.), emblem of the destructive powers and agencies of Divine judgments (cf. Ps. cxlviii. 8: Jer. xlix. 36: Rev. vii. 2, 3). *Henderson* gives, "angels or celestial spirits, represented as employed by God to carry into effect his high behests, which they receive in his immediate presence (Job i. 6; ii. 1), and then proceed to the different quarters of the globe in which the special operations of Divine Providence are to be carried forward." **6. North**] To conquer Babylonians. **After them**] Alexander and his successors

go forth to conquer the Persians. **South**] Egypt and Arabia. **7. Bay**] Lit. strong or fleet. **Sought**] Eagerly seeking for permission to do what had to be done. **Walk**] in the land, unmolested by invasion, yet not free from annoyance; a mixed state of affairs in Israel for a considerable period. **Get**] Permission given by him who commands the chariots. **8. Quieted my spirit**] *i. e.* have appeased mine anger, or caused it to rest (Judges viii. 3: Eccl. x. 4: Ezek. v. 13). Babylon alone in the days of the prophet was punished; God's anger was satisfied in that direction; other monarchies had to expiate their sins. **9.**] *The ninth vision.* Crowns on Joshua. **10. 11.**] The persons named appear to have formed a deputation from the captives still remaining in Babylon, who had sent them with contributions in gold and silver, to help forward the building of the temple at Jerusalem. These deputies had deposited their gifts in the house of Josiah, to which the prophet is commanded to repair, and take what was necessary for making the two crowns, which were to be placed on the head of the high priest [*Henderson*]. **Crowns**] A symbol of the priesthood and kingdom of Messiah (Rev. xix. 12). **12. The man**] shadowed forth in Joshua, viz. the Messiah. **Branch**] As if it were a proper name, as appears not only by the lack of the article, but by the established usage of the earlier prophets [*Lange*]. (Cf. iii. 8: Isa. iv. 2: Jer. xxiii. 5). **Grow**] Shall sprout out from his place, *i. e.* from his land or nation; not an exotic, but a root-shoot of the real stock. "Not merely from Bethlehem or Nazareth, but by his *own power*, without man's aid, in miraculous conception" [*Henderson*]. **Build**] the future spiritual temple; an encouragement to Jews that the material temple will be finished in spite of opposition. **13. Glory**] A reference to the insignia of majesty put on the head of Joshua; the honour and authority of sovereign. **Sit and rule**] The former denotes the possession of the honour and dignity of a king; the latter, the actual exercise of royal authority [*Hengs.*]. **Priest**] Priestly and kingly offices united in him on one throne. **Peace**] Civil and religious authorities working together, typify the harmony of his kingdom and priesthood; no clashing of jurisdiction between the two offices. "By the **counsel** or *purpose of* **peace**, is understood the glorious scheme of reconciliation between God and man, effected by the joint exercise of the sacerdotal and regal offices of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Isa. ix. 6: Mic. v. 5: Ephes. ii. 14—17: Col. i. 20, 21: Heb. xiii. 20" [*Henderson*]. **14. Helem**] The same as *Heldai* and **Hen**] Another name of *Josiah* (ver. 10). Not unusual among Jews for one man to be known by two names. **Memorial**] The crowns not for these persons to wear, but a symbol of the act just taken place; hence to be desposited in the temple as pledges of the Messiah, to animate their anticipations of his appearance. **15. Far off**] Gentiles shall be called, and shall actively participate in setting up the kingdom of God. **Know**] When events correspond to predictions. **Come**] Unbelief would not hinder the accomplishment of the promise; but if they obeyed, the temple would be finished, and in the latter days this would be realized. The benefits of the Messiah's coming and work were conditional to them. The large portion of the Jews were disobedient, and perverted the prophets. *Henderson* and others consider the words an *aposiopesis;* a figure of speech by which *emphatic silence* conveys an intimation more impressively than words. If ye will hearken, then—"The words simply declare that Israel will not come to the knowledge of the Messiah, or to his salvation, unless it hearkens to the voice of the Lord. Whoever intentionally closes his eyes, will be unable to see the salvation of God" [*Keil*].

HOMILETICS.

God's Providence guards the Interests of the Christian Church.—*Verses* 1—8.

Under the type of four chariots the providence of God is represented in this vision as guiding the agencies of the world, in reference to the destinies of God's people

I. The powers of the world are subservient to the interests of the Christian Church. The history of the world is arranged with a view to promote the welfare of God's people and to establish the kingdom of the Messiah. Hence all things are designed and adjusted to work in mutual action and united tendency for the good of the Christian (Rom. viii. 28). 1. *In their origin.* "There came four chariots out from between two mountains." Calvin explains the mountains as the hiding-place of the Divine purpose, which is kept back until the time for its revelation and execution. All events and agencies emanate from the decrees of God, which are firm and immovable as mountains of brass. 2. *In their nature.* The messengers of God are sent to accomplish various designs. Some go on errands of bloodshed and mourning; some as heralds of joy and triumph; and others have missions mixed with joy and grief, prosperity and adversity 3. *In their direction.* Some go to the north, and others to the south (ver. 6). They all start from a common centre,

the purpose of the Eternal, but are sent in different directions. In all quarters of the globe God is supreme, and sees the end from the beginning of events. Nothing is contingent or happens unknown to him. "Political changes," says Moore, "are only the moving of the shadow on the earthly dial-plate that marks the mightiest revolutions going forward in the heavens." **II. The powers of the world are employed according to the design of God concerning the Christian Church.** God's swift messengers are sent forth to accomplish the counsels of his will. 1. *To punish some.* War, pestilence, famine, and destructive agencies bring mourning and distress. God can turn nations one against another, and white horses may follow black. 2. *To caution others.* To many, providences are a cup mixed with bitter and sweet; life to them is now prosperous and then adverse. 3. *To help God's people.* Whatever be the dispensations of God to others, they portend good only to his people. Swiftly and triumphantly are the chariots driven along, agitating the earth like rushing winds; but the Church of God is secure. "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early."

The Administration of Divine Providence.—*Verses* 2—8.

In this vision we have an insight of the providence of God in its relation to men. **I. It is various in its aspects.** There were red and white horses, grisled and bay. Events have different aspects, and the times change like the face of the sky. One thing is set over against the other, and the cup of God's hand is full of mixture (Ps. lxxv. 8). **II. It is supreme in its operations.** All events "go forth" from God. He commands and he restrains. He is supreme, 1. *Over all agencies.* The chariots are driven by his skill, and the winds gathered in his fists (Prov. xxx. 4). 2. *Over all times.* In all ages of the world, and in every period of national and personal history, God rules. All the laws and forces of the universe were created and are preserved and directed by him. There is no chance nor caprice; there are no inferior deities, like the store-keepers of Jupiter, in the providence of God. **III. It is wonderful in its method.** In John's vision angels are represented as *holding* the winds (Rev. vii. 1). "Why not the angels," asks Wardlaw, "in the vision of Zechariah, be considered as *directing* the winds?" Angels stand before God, "excel in strength," and are "ministers of his that do his pleasure." How strange that God should employ the mightiest and most intelligent creatures in the universe on our behalf. Well may Shakespeare exclaim, "Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!" **IV. It is rapid in its movements.** Swift as chariots and sudden as the winds are changes often wrought. Now sunshine beams upon nations and they bask in prosperity; then clouds and storms gather over them and joy is driven away. "The chariot of God's providence runneth not upon broken wheels," says Rutherford. **V. It is satisfactory to God in its results.** "They have quieted my spirit." This may refer to the satisfaction of Divine justice in executing vengeance upon the enemies of his people (cf. ch. i. 15, and Isa. i. 24). Wrath and mercy may be deferred, but will eventually be revealed God's people should hope on and work earnestly. God's enemies should beware lest they be overtaken in their sins. "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."

The Ministry of Angels.—*Verse* 7.

In these words the charioteers are represented as asking permission to do what they could for the holy land. They have to wait, but the command is given and they are swift in obedience. Take them as describing the ministry of angels.

I. It is extensive in range. "To and fro through the earth." North or south, as God commissions them (ver. 6). **II. It is antagonistic in its character.** Satan and his angels walk to and fro in the earth to do mischief. They roam in

restless activity, and no place is secure from their attacks (Job i. 7). But the messengers of Jehovah are more numerous and powerful than all against us. The ultimate triumph is certain, we may therefore have confidence. III. It is retributive in its design. To punish the enemies of God's people and satisfy the demands of his justice. They not only minister mercy but execute vengeance. IV. It is eager in its spirit. They "*sought* to go that they might walk," they were eager and ready to be employed.

> "They stand with wings outespread
> Listening to catch the Master's least command,
> And fly through Nature ere the moment ends" [*Carrington*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *Brass.* Mountains of brass denote the immovable decrees of God, his steady execution of his counsels, and the insuperable restraints that are upon all empires and counsels, which God keeps within the barriers of such impregnable mountains that not one can start till he opens the way [*Cruden's Concordance*].

Ver. 4. *What?* Difficulty doth but whet desire in heroic spirits; the harder the vision, the more earnest was the prophet's inquisition; he was restless till better resolved, and therefore applieth himself again to his angel tutor, rather than tutelar, whom for honour's sake he called my lord [*Trapp*].

Ver. 7. *Sought.* This doth not teach that the angels are more careful of this world than God is, of whom they desired it. But *first*, that they can do nothing without commission from him. *Secondly*, that they are ever ready to offer their service and yield obedience upon the least intimation of the Divine pleasure [*Trapp*]. From the whole section we learn—that the earth may seem to be quiet and at peace while the people of God are in a weak and suffering condition; that the outward peace of the earth will be disturbed in due time, and God's people wonderfully delivered; that whatever sad dispensations God sends upon the nations, the Church will be his special care; that his purpose will be fully accomplished and all things done according to his mind, therefore his people may trust his wisdom, power, and love.

HOMILETICS.

The Messiah's Person and Work.—*Verses* 9—13.

In predictions concerning the Messiah we find word combined with action, prophecy coalescing with history. An example of symbolic prediction based upon present history is found in the text. In presence of a deputation of Jews from Babylon, the prophet was charged to place a crown on the head of Joshua, the high priest, and then deliver the prophecy. Its form and spirit, the union of the priestly and regal office, forbid us to confine it to Jewish restoration. It is founded upon visible representations, yet in mystic vision soars into the future.

I. The person of the Messiah is described. Behold *the man*, the man marked and well known, the true man and most eminent of all men (Hosea ii. 16). Not man wretched and miserable, mortal and dying (Job xxv. 6: cf. Ps. viii. 4); but man with the characteristics of a man—strength, courage, and pre-eminence. Joshua and his companions were men of signs (ch. iii. 8), but in none of them were the priestly and regal splendours united. Then the word *branch* designates a future person, a sprout of Jehovah (Isa. iv. 2), a descendant of David. The Messiah is the priest and king. Zechariah *revives* the prophecy of Jeremiah (xxxiii. 15). One

belongs to the last predictions at the beginning of the captivity, and the other is one of the first after it is past. God does not forget his promise, and will never forsake his people. In every age it may be said, "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings." **II. The work of the Messiah is specified.** 1. *He shall grow up out of his place.* He shall sprout up from his place, *i. e.* from the place peculiar to him; not merely from Bethlehem or Nazareth, but by his own power, without man's help, in his miraculous conception. Some refer this to his springing up from a low family; others, to the growth of the Church under him. It is better to apply it as above. He shall grow by virtue of his own power, with rapid and vigorous increase. He springs from God in his human and Divine nature, shot forth through man, blossoming in the royal line of David, yet neither sown, nor planted, nor propagated by human hands. He shall continue to grow, extend his power and dominion, and his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom. 2. *He shall build the temple*, the Church of God, which is the house and temple of God (1 Cor. iii. 16: 1 Tim. iii. 15: 1 Pet. ii. 5). Of this temple he is the author and foundation (Ephes. ii. 20—22). It is growing in beauty and numbers, filled with his light and glory, and is the school of instruction, the monument of wisdom to the universe (Ephes. iii. 10). The repetition may indicate the certainty of the work being commenced and finished, or give emphasis to the truth, to encourage faith in his person and confidence in his work. **III. The honour of the Messiah is set forth.** 1. *He* (himself) *shall bear the glory.* The crowns of royalty, the robes and insignia of office, shall hang upon him and adorn his person. He shall *lift up* the glory (as the word means) which had been depressed and despised. It shall be exalted in him, not divided any longer between kings and priests, but the government shall be upon his shoulders alone, and he shall have the glory (Isa. ix. 6: Phil. ii. 9—11). 2. *He shall sit and rule.* For a king to sit was nothing strange, but contrary to the custom of priests, who stood daily (Heb. x. 11). But Christ has offered one sacrifice and obtained eternal redemption; he has finished his work, will never rise to perform it a second time, but now *sits* for ever at the right hand of God: a *priest upon his throne*, whom the people cannot approach without priestly intercession. Here the majesty of a prince is blended with the sympathy of a priest (Heb. ii. 18; iv. 15; v. 2). **IV. The special arrangement with the Messiah is mentioned.** "The counsel of peace shall be between them both." The words allude, first of all, to Joshua and Zerubbabel, then to the priestly and kingly office of Christ. Formerly kings and priests had counselled together for the peace and prosperity of the Church and the State. Now these offices may be centred in one person, and no longer kept distinct; yet each must have its dignity. The majesty of the king is not to be displayed without the intercession of the priest. There is no depression of one to exalt the other, no confounding together, but harmony and co-operation. The priest is a king, and the king is a priest. There may be reference also to the plan of redemption, a plan of infinite wisdom, and Christ is called "Counsellor" (Isa. ix. 6). As in the creation of man, so was there consultation in his redemption. *Peace* is the grand result; harmony in the moral government of God, peace between God and man, and man and man. "On earth peace, goodwill toward men" [By the Author, from *The Study*, 1873].

Christ the Builder of the Temple.—*Verse* 13.

The temple is not that of which Zerubbabel was the builder; but the spiritual temple, the house, the Church of God.

I. He drew the plan. The Divine Architect who made and beautified the world planned the structure of his house. Everything is specified and pre-ordained. Sects may scheme and build, but Christ alone can rear "the Church of the living

God, the pillar and ground of truth." **II. He collect the materials.** For a material temple the stones are not naturally prepared. Solomon had to fell the timber and cut out the stones. Christ collects the living stones of this wonderful building. 1. *He bought them.* He shed his precious blood and "gave his life a ransom for many." 2. *He prepares them.* He renews by his grace, forms and polishes them for their place in the building. "In whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth into an holy temple in the Lord." **III. He unites the materials when collected.** He assigns them their suitable position, and puts them together more firmly than any human being or human theory could "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." **IV. He employs others to help in this work.** Christ is the sole builder, others are under-builders. Paul was "as a wise master-builder," and "laid the foundation," but he declared "another buildeth thereon." Ministers are only assistant instruments, and cannot add a single stone without his aid. "He shall build," and under his superintending care and by his Divine agency "the temple" shall be finished. In due time the head-stone shall be brought forth with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it."

CHRIST GLORIFIED AS THE BUILDER OF HIS CHURCH.—*Verse* 13.

1. The first point is *the temple.* The temple is the Church of God, not in any narrow, sectarianism sense. Any company of Christian men gathered together in holy bonds of communion, for the purpose of receiving God's ordinances and preaching God's word, is a Church. All believers scattered throughout the world, all Churches gathered together from the one Universal Apostolic Church. Why is the Church called the temple of God? The temple was *the special residence of God*, the place of *the clearest manifestation*, and a *place of worship.* For these reasons the Church is said to be the temple of God. 2. The next is *the builder* of the temple. Make a parallel between Solomon, the builder of the first temple, and Christ, the builder of the Church. Solomon was wise, but needed instructions and a pattern. Christ is no Solomon in this respect. A mountain, Moriah, was ready made for the first temple; for the second, the foundation was laid in oaths, promises, and blood. Again, Christ excels Solomon in providing all the materials. He hews them himself, rough-casts them first, then during life polishes them till ready for the hill of God whereon the temple is built. In Solomon's temple the stones were made ready in the quarries, and no sound of the hammer was heard; so we must be made meet for heaven. There will be no sanctifying there if not ready beforehand. 3. Pause and admire *the glory* of the builder. "He shall bear the glory." Half his glory can never be told. Note first that the glory shall be *a weighty glory.* "They shall hang upon him all the glory of his Father's house." He shall have *all* the glory, all that can be conceived, desired, and imagined. This glory is *continual* glory. When shall his dominion become effete? He *shall* bear all the glory. 4. Now for the *practical application.* Are we built upon Christ? Can we say that we are a part of his temple, that his handiwork has been exhibited in us, and that we are built together with Christ? If so, honour God, for he has highly honoured you. Think that you might have been disgraced, abandoned, and cast away, but now made temples of the Holy Ghost! If no portion in Israel, if not stones in the spiritual temple, how sad never to be used in the building up of God's Jerusalem! It may seem a slight thing to be left out of the muster-roll of the Church to-day, but will it seem a slight thing to be left out when Christ shall call for his people? When the list is read before the great white throne, and your name left out, then there will be no change, no deliverance. Submit now, and believe in Jesus Christ to-day [From *Spurgeon*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 9—12. *First*, the offerings of these people. We know little or nothing concerning the persons who brought the gold and silver, but God can touch the hearts of strangers and dispose all to contribute to his work. *Second*, the use of these offerings. They were *accepted*, though sent by some who perhaps preferred to remain severed from the temple and the people of God. They were *used as a memorial* in the crowns placed on the head of Joshua. "Every contribution toward the building up of the Church coming from a true heart was its memorial before God, and is a testimony before the world of the Divinity of the gospel" [*Lange*]. They were gladly received. "Come thou, the same day." The people required speedy and great comfort, and no sooner were they prepared than the favours were ready (2 Chron. xxix. 36). God delays no blessing when we are earnest in his work.

Vers. 12, 13. *The temple of the Lord.* "Even he," &c., constantly and confidently affirm and aver it, that notwithstanding all unlikelihood and unbelief on the people's part, Almighty God will surely bring it to pass. This heap of words importeth so much, for "do ye think the Scripture speaketh in vain?" saith St. James, not without some holy indignation (iv. 5) [*Trapp*]. The Church of God is often set forth under the image of a temple. The allusion was peculiarly natural in a Jewish writer, considering the importance attached to the house of God in Jerusalem. The name is founded on three reasons. First, *consecration*. A temple is appropriated to sacred uses. The people of God are separated from the world and dedicated to his service. "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." Beware of profane mixtures, maintain your sacredness, and keep yourselves pure from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. Secondly, *residence*. A mansion is a dwelling for a nobleman, a palace for a king, a temple for God. "Ye are the temple of the living God;" "I dwell in them, and walk in them." He is everywhere, but in the Church by a special presence, in a way of grace, influence, and operation. This secures and dignifies it. "This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it." What are numbers, fine buildings, or imposing ceremonies to communion with the living God? Thirdly, *devotion*. He is served and worshipped in them as a temple; he receives homage and adoration nowhere else according to his own requisition. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him," &c. His worship, therefore, is a reasonable service; not gross, but spiritual sacrifices. Though prayers, praise, and alms are imperfect and defiled; yet they result from principle, aim at the glory of God, and being offered through the Mediator, and with his incense, they are accepted, and the worshipper has this testimony, that he pleases God [*Jay*].

HOMILETICS.

Jesus upon His Throne.—*Verse* 13.

A throne is, literally, the seat of a king, and therefore the emblem of royalty. Solomon's throne was made of ivory and gold, so that "there was none like it in any kingdom." But a greater than Solomon is here. A greater than angels, for unto "the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," &c.

Yet how sublime and unrivalled! it is *his* throne; he has dearly earned it, and sees in it the travail of his soul. God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name. It is *his* by Divine ordination, and by the suffrage of his people. They are made willing in the day of his power, and avow his name only.

But many who ascend a throne can hardly be said to *sit and rule* there. They are

hurled by violence, or drop by weakness, from it. If they continue on it for awhile they have little pleasure or repose; they are filled with fear and cares, and cannot do what they wish. In spite of the sovereign of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces, Daniel was thrown into the lions' den. What a wretch is Ahab, king of Israel, who is sick, and can neither eat nor drink, because he cannot get a few feet of garden ground from a faithful subject. But Jesus "shall *sit* and *rule* upon his throne." He will never be deposed, never die. Nothing can impede, nothing perplex him. He rules in the midst of enemies who shall be made his footstool. He will display wisdom and power in correcting their designs and making their efforts subserve his own purpose. Though his spiritual empire at present be limited, yet remember two things. *First*, his real dominion is universal. He is not only King of saints, but King of kings, and the King of nations; all creatures serve him. The treasures of grace, the elements of nature, and the dispensations of providence are his. He is the head over all things to the Church. *Secondly*, though his kingdom be limited, and subjects who obey him from the heart be few at present, it will not always be so, nor be so long. "He shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession." Yea, all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him [*Jay*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 15. *Afar off.* Distant nations, symbolized by those from captivity (ver. 9), shall be called. This was partially fulfilled in Cyrus, Darius, Artaxerxes, and Herod, who greatly assisted in the temple work. But the conversion of the Gentiles is here set forth. They shall be united to Israel in faith and privilege, and the truth of prophecy shall be realized. 1. *This event is certain.* "This shall come to pass." 2. *The truth of the word will be proved when it does come to pass.* "You shall know that the Lord of Hosts has sent me unto you." 3. *But it shall be fulfilled only to those who obey the word preached unto them.* For "this shall come to pass if ye will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God." To secure the favour of God we must obey, and *diligently* obey, him. This knowledge and experience depend upon individual faithfulness and effort. 4. Hence, though the performance of the promise be not suspended upon men's conduct, yet *neglect of duty may hinder its fulfilment.* If men despise knowledge, stifle convictions, and reject the truth, Christ's work will not profit them. By this means they bring "swift destruction" upon themselves, and not the blessings of the Messiah's reign.

From the whole chapter, learn— 1. *God's cause shall be avenged even by his enemies.* The messengers of earth and heaven shall alike fulfil his pleasure. 2. *God's cause shall be supported by his friends.* "The silver and the gold are the Lord's," and these they will not fail to bestow where it is in their power to give; while God will graciously remember their works of faith and labours of love. 3. *God's cause shall be honoured by the Mediator.* All the purposes of eternal love are accomplished in him. To him belong dominion and glory, and on his head are many crowns. When the great events of his kingdom are consummated, then shall he become all in all" [*Cobbin*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VI.

Vers. 1—8. *Providence.* Everything that acts for an end must know that end or be directed by another to attain that end. The arrow doth not know who shoots it, or to what end it is shot, or what mark it is aimed at; but the archer that puts it in and darts it out of the bow knows [*Charnock*]. Providence certainly does not attend merely to the interests of individuals, but the profound

wisdom of its counsels extends to the right ordering and betterment of all [*Humbolt*].

Ver. 5. *Angels stand.* A king is there where his court is, where his train and retinue are; so God, the Lord of Hosts, is there specially present where the heavenly guard, the blessed angels, keep their sacred station and rendezvous [*Mede*].

Ver. 8. *Justice satisfied.* Justice is the key-note of the world, and all else is ever out of tune [*Theodore Parker*]. Justice always whirls in equal measure [*Shakespeare*].

Vers. 10—15. Prophets introduce gospel subjects. Zechariah, especially, in mystic vision and by typical representation, which yet are sufficiently clear, as expressive of the kingdom and priesthood of *Christ*, the establishment of the *Christian Church*, and the concourse of nations resorting to that *future Temple*. For here we have a *second* application of the same *systematic* form of prophecy which was employed in the establishment of the temporal kingdom. The nearer subject in each instance supplies the prophetic ground and the prophetic images for the future Christian subject. In the first instance, the kingdom of Christ is delineated in connection with, and by analogy to, the actual kingdom which was seen before men's eyes rising to view; in the second instance, his *personal* priesthood and his Church are delineated in connection with, and by an equal analogy to, the priesthood and temple of the Hebrew Church, at the time when that priesthood was reinstated in its functions and that temple was rebuilt. This is an example of *symbolic* prediction founded upon the *present scene* of things [*Davison* on Prophecy].

Vers. 12, 13. *The man.* A man's a man; but when you see a king you see the work of many thousand men [*G. Eliot*]. *Throne.* He was a king blessed of the King of kings [*Shakespeare*]. Kings ought to be kings in all things [*Adrian*].

Ver. 15. *Diligently.* The expectations of life depend upon diligence, and the mechanic that would perfect his work must first sharpen his tools [*Confucius*]. What we hope ever to do with ease we may learn first to do with diligence [*Johnson*]. Toil, feel, think, hope. A man is sure to dream enough before he dies without making arrangements for the purpose [*Sterling*].

CHAPTER VII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **The Didactic part.** Replies to questions relative to fasts observed by the Jews, but which they supposed no longer binding after restoration to prosperity. **Fourth**] Two years, nearly, after the foundation of the temple was laid (Hag. ii. 10—18), and nearly two years before it was finished. **Chisleu**] Corresponding with part of November and part of December. "The end of B.C. 518" [*Pusey*]. **2. House of God**] here a rendering for *Bethel*. **Unto**] A word for which there is no corresponding Hebrew. *Bethel* is construed by most as nominative to the verb, and the translation given, "When Bethel (*i. e.* the inhabitants of that city) sent Sherezer and Regem-melech, and their men" as an embassy to Jerusalem. **Pray**] Lit. *to entreat the face of, i. e.* to seek and conciliate the favour of Jehovah, to obtain a Divine answer to their inquiry. **3. Weep**] They fasted and mourned in captivity, on account of the ruins of the temple. Why fast now when the city and temple are being restored? **Separating**] by vow of consecration, sanctifying oneself by separating from defilement and food, as in solemn fast (cf. Joel ii. 16). **4. Word**] of reproof for the method and spirit in which they fasted. **5. All**] The answer given not only to those who put the question, but to the people at large. **Fasted**] in *fifth* month in remembrance of the burning of the temple; in *seventh* to commemorate the murder of Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. **To me**] Fasting alien from God and for selfish ends. **6. Did**] ye not eat and drink in self-indulgence?

Neither in feasting nor fasting had they any regard for Jehovah; all was done for self-interest. 7. Words] of former prophets threatened a curse upon hypocrisy and disobedience, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous. The lessons of former teachers had been verified in the nation's history; they should heed the warning. **8—14.]** God requires obedience, not formal fastings. The disobedience of the fathers brought judgment upon the nation. **9. Execute]** Admonitions which have special reference to evils of which they were guilty. **Judgment]** Righteous impartiality in public and private matters. "Judgment of truth (cf. Ezek. xviii. 8) is such an administration of justice as simply fixes the eye upon the real circumstances of any dispute, without any personal considerations whatever, and decides them in accordance with truth" [*Keil*]. **Mercy]** Tender love to all. **Compassion]** to the unhappy, sympathy for human suffering. **10.]** This verse specifies some of the chief ways of violating the preceding requisition, and shows that it covers the thoughts of the heart as well as the acts of the members [*Lange*]. **Imagine]** *i. e.* devise evil (Ps. xxxvi. 4: Mic. ii. 1). Meditate no revenge, but act up to the royal law of love. **11]** The attitude of the people towards these precepts described. Their fathers and some of them **refused]**, paid no serious attention; then **pulled away**, like a refractory beast refusing the yoke (Neh. ix. 29: Hosea iv. 16). "It seems rather to refer to one on whose shoulder we lay our hand, when he is reluctant to listen to us, in order to arrest, and beseech him to hear, but he fretfully and violently 'draws the shoulder' from our kind and earnest grasp" [*Wardlaw*]. **Stopped]** Made heavy (Isa. vi. 10: Jer. vii. 26: Acts vii. 57). **12. Adamant]** Hard and impenetrable as stone (Ezek. iii. 9; xi. 19). **Wrath]** The consequence of disobedience and obduracy (2 Chr. xxxvi. 16). **13. He]** by his prophets. **They]** cried in calamities, retribution in kind. They would not hear God, and he would not hear them (Prov. i. 24—26: Isa. i. 15). **14.]** The great wrath described in its execution. **Scattered]** for 70 years among foreign and barbarous nations; like a tempest driven among those who pitied them not. **After]** their exile and expulsion no occupants possessed the land. **Passed through]** Lit. goes away and returns again (Ex. xxxii. 27), pass to and fro. **They]** The Jews themselves to blame; they desolated the **pleasant land]** lit. the land of desire; made the choice land a desert by their sins (Jer. iii. 19: Ps. cvi. 24).

HOMILETICS.

Past Warnings and Present Judgments.—*Verse* 7.

The former prophets taught the worthlessness of fasting, when God was forgotten and the weightier matters of the law disregarded. If the Jews had listened to the messages, the evils which they were suffering would not have come upon them. Belief that fasting could obtain the favour of God overthrew the nation. Hence take warning—

I. Israel had been warned in the past. "The Lord hath cried by the former prophets." God declares his will loudly and sufficiently in his word, but men disregard the trumpet-call. 1. *Warned by various messengers.* Zechariah was not the first prophet; they had been warned by every prophet whom Jehovah had sent. 2. *Warned in different periods.* Warnings were not only addressed to them in adversity, when men should "consider," but in prosperity, when they should humble themselves before God to save themselves from the punishment of pride and rebellion; when Jerusalem was inhabited in prosperity. God tells us beforehand, arranges "one over against another," that we may rightly chose and have no excuse for our sin (Ecc. vii. 14). **II. If past warnings had been regarded present punishment might have been avoided.** "Should ye not hear the words?" Should men disregard the Scriptures and have no concern for their own salvation and the interests of the nation? Too often the admonitions of ministers are disregarded by those flushed with prosperity. The Jews before and after the captivity failed to learn from their fathers, and had to mourn for their country. "Study the past, if you would divine the future" [*Confucius*].

Divine Requirements and Human Disregard.—*Verses* 8—14.

The prophet exposes the hollowness of mere outward forms, and reminds the people that their ruin was not caused by neglect of ritual, but by disregard of the plainest duties of justice and humanity. They had refused to hear the reiterated and explicit injunctions of the prophets, and they are reproved for their folly. Notice—

I. The Divine requirements specified. They had practised injunctions of their own imposing and neglected the commands of God. The prophet repeats the substance of former teaching and urges the claims of Jehovah. 1. *Sincerity in life.* Obedience is better than sacrifice. (1) *Execute judgment.* Practise justice officially and privately, before God and man. Judgment must be *true*, without personal considerations or partiality. "He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man." (2) *Compassionate the miserable.* "Show mercy" to the unfortunate, be kind and have "compassions every man to his brother." "Kindness is the golden chain by which society is bound together," says Goethe (3) *Oppress not the helpless.* Special regard must be paid to the widow and the fatherless, the stranger and the poor. "Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child" (Ex. xxii. 21). "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." 2. *Purity in heart.* We must not only do no wrong, but not even wish it. No evil must be devised in the heart. "Let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart." Cherish no ill-feeling, no wish to retaliate. All evil inclinations and spiteful intentions must be subdued. We can never act rightly if we do not feel and think rightly. Hence the law of God restrains the heart. "Beware that there be not a thought (word) in thy wicked (Belial) heart" (Deut. xv. 9). **II. The Divine requirements disregarded.** Except men execute judgment, whatever be their fastings and pretensions, they reject the word of God. Ceremonial observances without love to God and man are a solemn mockery. 1. *They refused to hearken to God's word.* They hated the claims and rebelled against the authority of God's commands (1) They were *wilfully deaf.* "Stopped their ears." (2) They were *wilfully prejudiced.* "That they should not hear." They had no desire to know, much less to practise. God pursued them in earnest, constant warning, but they shook their shoulders, refused to submit or bear the yoke, and were determined in their obstinate purpose (cf. Acts vii. 51). "They hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward." 2. *They hardened their hearts in sin.* "They made their hearts as an adamant stone." They were resolved that nothing should make an impression upon them: they became proud, presumptuous, and inflexible. Divine power even could neither soften their hearts nor shape their lives. "They dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments (which, if a man do, he shall live in them), and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck and would not hear." **III. The fatal consequences of disregarding the Divine requirements.** Most terrible are the penalties here set forth. "Therefore," since they have rejected God, punishment will be in proportion to the violation of his law. "Terrible penalties, withal, if thou still need penalties," says Carlyle, "are there for disobeying." 1. *God was angry.* "Therefore came" wrath, a great wrath, from the Lord of hosts. This anger is evinced—(1) *By disregarding their prayers.* "They cried, and I would not hear." There is "great reason," says Bp. Reynolds, "that God shall refuse to hear him who refuseth to hear God." "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." (2) *By scattering them among other nations.* "I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations." The common bond of humanity and social intercourse was broken (Deut. xxviii. 49, 50); they were cast out of their own into a land of perfect strangers, from whom they received no kindness nor mitigation of sorrows. 2. *The land was desolated.* "For they laid the pleasant land desolate." It was not the enemy, but their own sins that had cursed their country. God's presence is the beauty of a nation, but sin will turn it into a barren waste. Human guilt desolates everything that is "pleasant." Let us take warning. If we despise God's word he will not hear our cry in the day of wrath. The harder men grow in heart, the

heavier the stroke at the judgment day. Those who are lost will have to blame their own folly. No delusion will rob them of this conviction, and no remedy can be devised for the misery which they despised and cannot endure. "They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

RIGHTEOUS RETRIBUTION.—*Verse* 13.

This is the first part of punishment, retribution in kind. They would not hear God when he called to them; now he will not hear them when they cry to him. This is God's method of dealing with nations and individuals.

I. **It is often physically true.** The drunkard pays when at last he feels himself the slave of habits which he knows will ruin soul and body, and yet unable to throw them off. The licentious who survive the power of gratification may be tortured by appetites for which exhausted nature has no provision [cf. *Lange*]. II. **It is always spiritually true.** He that digs a pit for another shall fall into it himself. The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own devices (Prov. xiv. 14). Those who contemn the word of God shall be unheard in the day of distress Alarmed at their situation, they will call, but God will not answer them. Thus men become the cause of their own misery, and constantly remind us of the wise man's words: "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way" (Prov. i. 30, 31; xxviii. 9: Gal. vi. 7, 8).

> "I do as truly suffer
> As e'er I did commit" [*Shakespeare*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 9. *Love*, the royal law of life, the essence of religion. Not religious profession, but the practice of social duty. Keep from evil in thought and act. Meditate no revenge, brood over no wrongs, but in all things act up to the requirements of God's law. "Love worketh no ill." "Love will not permit us to injure, oppress, or offend our brother; it will not give us leave to neglect our betters, or despise our inferiors. It will restrain every inordinate passion, and not suffer us to gratify our envy at the expense of our neighbour's credit and reputation; but it will preserve us harmless and innocent" [*Bp. Sherlock*].

Moral duties. Required in every age. Superior to external ordinances.

Ver. 10. *Widow and fatherless.* 1. A sad condition in life. Weak and helpless. 2. A proof of God's care. "Widows and orphans are God's clients taken into his special protection" [*Trapp*]. 3. An evidence of true religion. "One of the surest tests of an intelligent Christianity, as well as of a high civilization, is found in the provision made and maintained for those who so often are the victims either of cruel neglect or, alas, of wilful oppression" [*Lange*]. Compare the teaching of Scripture with the customs of heathenism.

Ver. 11. *Pulled away the shoulder.* What is implied in these words? 1. A benevolent purpose. 2. Remarkable human power to resist it. 3. Mysterious providence to permit resistance. 4. Astounding effrontery in the conduct indicated. "Pride not only withdraws the heart from God, but lifts it up against God" [*Manton*].

> "All pride is willing pride" [*Shakespeare*].

Ver. 12. *Hearts as adamant.* The stone, whatever it be, was hard enough to cut ineffaceable characters (Jer. xvii. 1); it was harder than flint (Ezek. iii. 9). It would cut rocks; it could not be engraven itself, or receive the characters of God. This is the last sin, obduracy, persevering impenitence, which resisted the Holy Ghost, and did despite to the Spirit of grace. Not through infirmity, but of set

purpose, they hardened themselves, lest they should be converted and be healed (Isa. vi. 10). Observe the gradations. 1. The words of God are not heard. 2. The restive shoulder is shown. Men turn away, when God by the inner motions of his Spirit, or by lesser chastisements, would bring them to the yoke of obedience. They would not bear the burden of the law, whereas they willingly bore that most heavy weight of their sins. 3. Obduracy. Their adamantine heart could be softened neither by promises nor threats; therefore nothing remained but the great wrath which they had treasured to themselves against the day of wrath [*Pusey*].

Hardness is the state of a person insensible alike to entreaties, expostulations, warnings, admonitions, and chastisements (Jer. v. 3). Men become obdurate—1. By separating themselves from God, the source of all life, just as a branch dries up when detached from the tree, or as a limb withers when the connection between it and the heart ceases. 2. By a life of pleasure and sin, the effects of which may be compared to those of the river north of Quito, petrifying, according to Kirwin's account, the wood and leaves cast into its waters; or to those of the busy feet of passers-by, causing the crowded thoroughfare to grow hard [*Rev. C. Neil*].

Vers. 11, 12. Causes of spiritual ruin. 1. Heedless indifference. 2. Stubborn rebellion—(1) in refusing the yoke, and (2) in stopping the ears. 3. Resistance to the Holy Spirit.

Vers. 13, 14. Self-inflicted calamities. 1. Rejection of God in trouble. 2. Dispersion in strange lands. 3. Devastation of country. Mark the contrast: *the land of desire* and *the land of desolation*. Obey the word of God and seek to reach that heavenly "land of desire," where desolation is unknown, and whither the spoiler can never come [cf. *Fausset*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VII.

Vers. 1—6. God or self—Which? A certain king had a minstrel, and he bade him play before him. It was a day of high feasting; the cups were flowing, and many great guests were assembled. The minstrel laid his fingers among the strings of his harp, and woke them all to the sweetest melody, but the hymn was to the glory of himself. It was a celebration of the exploits of song which the bard had himself performed. He had excelled high Howell's harp, and emulated great Llewellyn's lay. In high-sounding strains he sung of himself and all his glories. When the feast was over, the harper said to the monarch, "Oh king, give me my guerdon; let the minstrel's mede be paid." And the king said, "Thou hast sung unto thyself; pay thyself: thine own praises were thy theme; be thyself the paymaster." He cried, "Did I not sing sweetly? O king, give me the gold!" But the king replied, "So much the worse for thy pride that thou shouldst lavish such sweetness upon thyself." If a man should grow grey-headed in the performance of good works, yet when at last it is known that he has done it all to himself, his Lord will say, "Thou hast done well enough in the eyes of man, but so much the worse, because thou didst it only to thyself, that thine own praises might be sung, and that thine own name might be extolled [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 7. *Not hear.* There is a story which tells of a bell which was suspended upon a rock of the ocean dangerous to navigation. The waves of the ocean beating upon it caused it to give a noise of warning to keep off the approaching mariner. It is said that at one time some pirates destroyed the bell to prevent the warning. Not long after these very pirates struck upon this rock and were lost. How many hush or remove the voice of warning from the point of danger, who as soon as the warning ceases founder upon the rock of temptation and are lost for ever [*McCosh*].

Vers. 8—10. *Duties.* Your daily

duties are a part of your religious life just as much as your devotions are [*H. W. Beecher*]. Formality in religion is the *name* of being alive [*Jenkyn*].

"The path of duty is the way to glory" [*Tennyson*].

Vers. 11, 12. *Stopped ears.* Wise men are instructed by reason; men of less understanding by experience; the most ignorant by necessity; and beasts by nature [*Cicero*].

"The ear is the road to the heart" [*Voltaire*].

Vers. 13, 14. *Come to pass.*

"The past lives o'er again
In its effects, and to the guilty spirit
The ever-frowning present is its image"
[*S. T. Coleridge.*]

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **The fate of their fathers urged them to obedience, now the promise of future prosperity. 2. Jealous**] Implying warmth of love and zeal. **Fury**] Indignation to enemies. **3.**] Proofs of love. **Returned**] Jerusalem forsaken when given up to foes; now God resumes abode. **Truth**] or fidelity, *i. e.* in which truth and fidelity towards Jehovah have their abode (Isa. i. 21: Jer. xvii. 17), fully realized under the Messiah. **4, 5.**] No sweeping disease among them; long life one of the greatest blessings of the theocracy; plenty of children playing securely in the streets (contrast Jer. vi. 11; ix. 21). **6. Marvellous**] These promised blessings seem incredible to the people; but nothing impossible to God. **7. East**] Lit. rising of the sun. **West**] Lit. the going down of the sun (cf. Isa. l. 1). They will be gathered from every region to which they were scattered. **8.**] The covenant renewed. **In truth**] On both sides the relation real and sincere (Hosea ii. 21, 22: Isa. xlviii. 1: 1 Kings iii. 6). **9.**] Adversity followed neglect of duty, now blessings promised to create courage. **Hands**] With such bright prospects be energetic and active (2 Sam xvi. 21). **These words**] of consolation and encouragement from Haggai and Zechariah. **10.**] A reason for courage in work. **No hire**] The labour of man and beast little or nothing; agricultural results meagre (cf. Hag. i. 6, 9—11; ii. 16—19). **Neither peace**] None free from the enemy in the ordinary pursuits of life; intestine broils and contentions prevailed everywhere. **11. Now**] a vivid contrast, blessings for obedience in building the temple. **12. Seed**] will be healthy and not fail to yield abundance (Hosea ii. 21, 22). **Dew**] beneficial, especially in hot climates, where rain is scarce. "Future abundance will compensate for the drought and scarcity of the past" [*Jerome*]. **13.**] All the blessings summed up in this verse. "The formula, to be a curse among the nations, is to be interpreted according to Jer. xxiv. 9; xxv. 9; xlii. 18: 2 Kings xxii. 19, as equivalent to being the object of a curse, *i. e.* so smitten by God as to serve as the object of curses. In harmony with this, the phrase to "become a blessing" is equivalent to being so blessed as to be used as a benedictory formula (cf. Gen. xlviii. 22: Jer. xxix. 22). "This promise is made to the remnant of Judah and Israel, and therefore of all the twelve tribes, who are to become partakers of the future salvationin undivided unity (cf. ch. ix. 10, 13; x. 6; xi. 14)" [*Keil*]. "The ground upon which this promise rests is given in verses 14 and 15, and it is closed in verses 16 and 17 by the addition of the condition upon which it is fulfilled." **14. Repented not**] Just as the threatening did not fail, neither shall the promise. **15.**] Just as in ch. vii. 9, 10, first positive (ver. 16), then negative (ver. 17). **Judge**] truly and promote peace. **Gates**] Places of administering justice. **17. Hate**] Lit. emphatic. "They are all these things which I hate;" *i. e.* the sum of what I hate; for they comprise the breaches of the two tables [cf. *Pusey*] 18, 19.] An answer to question (ch. vii. 3). **Fasts**] shall be turned into **Feasts**] of joy and gladness. **Love**] Live in harmony among yourselves as the *result*: others as the only *condition* of blessing. **20. Yet**] Emphatic. **People**] shall be attracted to God's house. **21. Saying**] Mutually appealing to one another. **Speedily**] Lit. go, going, implying intense earnestness and determination. **I also**] Prompt response. **22. Many**] in contrast to a few and weak Jews now engaged in God's work. **23. Ten**] A definite for an indefinite number; denoting a great and complete multitude (Gen xxxi. 7: Lev. xxvi. 26: Num. xiv. 22). For the figure cf. Isa. iv. 1. Converts from among the Gentiles shall be as ten to one Jew. **All languages**] *i. e.* of nations of all languages. **Take hold**] A gesture of entreaty for help and protection (Isa. iii. 6: 1 Sam. xv. 32). **With you**] An effect often produced upon unbelievers when entering the assemblies of Christians (1 Cor. xiv. 25). Primarily produced on the nations who witnessed the deliverance by Cyrus; finally, that to be produced by the future grand interposition of Messiah on behalf of his people [cf. *Fausset*].

HOMILETICS.

The Restoration of Lost Purity.—*Verses* 1—3.

The prophet had rebuked the people for their formalism and set forth the results of disobedience. Now he assures them of God's love, and describes the consequences of obedience in restored privileges and restored purity. Their purity is restored—

I. By the manifestation of God. This is the first requirement. Man has wandered from God, sinned so much that he has no disposition to return. The sun must first shine to draw the plant. Grace must first work to dispose the heart. Men can never convert themselves; they have fallen, but God alone can raise them again. "Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned." **II. By reconciliation to God.** God can never dwell with wickedness. When Jerusalem was in the hands of enemies God forsook the temple. Only when we forsake sin and return to God—when reconciled to him—do we secure the aid of his grace and Spirit to purify us. Conversion leads to renovation and holiness of character. "Do thou give us the grace of conversion and amendment," says W. Lowth, "and then thou wilt remove thy heavy judgments, and restore us to that happiness and prosperity which we formerly enjoyed." **III. By consecration to God.** When God returned to Zion it became "a city of truth." It became what it had been before, the city which God had "chosen to put his name there." Hence—1. *The city was holy.* "The holy mountain." Holy as the residence of Jehovah and the object of devout veneration. True worship and spiritual blessings were restored. "The name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there." 2. *The people were truthful.* Their attachment to God sincere and not hypocritical; their love to man not in word, but in deed and of a truth. The proof of real conversion is not in partial, outward reform, but in devotion to God and growth in holiness founded upon truth. As God is righteous and holy, those who enjoy his favour must partake of these qualities. "The new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

God's Love and its Wonderful Displays.—*Verses* 1—8.

The Jews are encouraged in distrust by the affection of God for them. He was jealous as a husband or loving father; he loved most earnestly, most constantly, and out of free love bestowed upon them the blessings here mentioned.

I. It is revealed by the authority of his word. "Again the word of the Lord of hosts came." In the former chapter we have reproof, in this encouragement, lest his people should despair. Times of adversity and reproof dishearten, hide the love of God, like clouds before the sun. But God repeats former messages, gives Scripture comforts, and reminds us of past deliverances. "I was jealous for her with great fury." **II. It is displayed in the manifestation of his presence.** "I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem." Ezekiel saw the glory of God depart from the sanctuary, and pictured the consequences in the conquest, bondage, and exile of Israel. But return is the pledge of his love and the path to pre-eminence. God's presence is heaven and its bliss; "the river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God." "As a countenance is made beautiful by the soul's shining through it, so the world is beautiful by the shining through it of God" [*Jacobi*]. **III. It is proved in abundant blessings.** Manifold are the blessings here promised. 1. *The Jews should be restored to their own city* (ver. 7). From east and west, from every nation, would they be redeemed. Their distance and weakness would be no barrier to Divine power. 2. *Spiritual privileges would be regained.* (*a*) *The covenant would be renewed.* God would be their God, and they would be his people. (*b*) *God's presence would be given.* He would dwell in their midst. (*c*) *Divine worship would be restored.* Jerusalem would be holy,

and idolatry and falsehood would eventually cease. The mount, the temple, the mercy-seat, and all the memorials of God's mercy would enhance their joy and privilege. 3. *Temporal prosperity would be given.* When God in covenant grace takes away sin, he takes away sorrow. (*a*) *Long life and freedom from disease.* Men and women would live to an advanced age. (*b*) *Outward peace and security.* The streets would be full of children playing in fearlessness and joy. Age sat resting the weight of years on its supporting staff, yet looking fresh and happy. Youth enjoyed its cheerful sports without the stern reproof or the angry growl. The sports of childhood and the benefits of old age are contrasted with the days of sin (Jer. ix. 21; vi. 11) and the purpose of God. "As the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands."

GOD'S WORKS GREATER THAN MAN'S CONCEPTION OF THEM.—*Verse* 6.

The promises just made seemed improbable, morally impossible to the Jews in their present condition. But God encourages faith by reminding them that what seemed incredible to them was possible to him. Learn—

I. Men stagger at the greatness of God's promises. "If it be marvellous" to you, something distinct and prominent from common events. The doings of God, by reason of his infinite greatness and goodness, are beyond anticipation, past belief. 1. *His people are few.* "A remnant" of what was once a great nation. Will he interfere on their behalf? 2. *The times seem unlikely.* "In these days" of infidelity, oppression, and sorrow. 3. *We doubt his word.* "These things are too good to be true." They can never be realized in our experience. 4. *We measure God by ourselves. We* cannot act, therefore God cannot perform his promises. They appear against the course of nature and the laws of worldly policy. Thus do we sin against God and wrong ourselves by measuring his power and purpose by human standards. Be "fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able also to perform." **II. God's promises are not too great for him to perform.** "Should it also be marvellous in mine eyes, saith the Lord of hosts?" 1. *His love indicates this.* It is unchangeable and never offers what he will not give. He forgives, and forgives abundantly. In daily life and Christian experience he works far more exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think. 2. *His power proves it.* "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Many things with man are impossible, but "with God all things are possible." Beware of profanity and unbelief (2 Kings vii. 2). Look to God in all things to increase faith and secure comfort. "I know that thou canst do everything" (Job xlii. 2).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *The word came.* The *first* (vers. 1—17) declaring the reversal of the former judgments, and the complete though conditional restoration of God's favour; the *second* (vers. 18—23) containing the answer to the original question as to those facts in the declaration of the joy and the spread of the gospel. The first has, again, a sevenfold, the second a threefold, subordinate division, marked by the beginning, *Thus saith the Lord of hosts* [*Pusey*].

Ver. 2. *Divine jealousy.* 1. Its nature. "Great jealousy" to love men and hate their sins. 2. Its object "Jealous for Zion." Though he punishes yet he loves. "The Lord will be jealous for his land, and pity his people."

Ver. 3. *Returned.* The departure of God a curse, and the return of God a blessing to a people. God's presence in ordinances and God's favour in providences.

Vers. 4, 5. *A delightful scene.* 1. Boys and girls playing in the streets. 2. Aged men and women watching them. "The sports of childhood—*innocent sports* in their own nature, of course—are the very instincts of that period of life; and they have here the sanction of a benevolent

God, being a part of his promised blessing to his favoured city. Who would like to be the man or the woman the sight of whom frightened such a group?" [*Wardlaw*]. *Great blessings.* 1. Longevity. 2. Peace and security. 3. Real enjoyments. "Thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel."

Ver. 6. *Marvellous.* 1. A great salvation. 2. Accomplished with (*a*) ease and (*b*) certainty, yet—3. Doubted by an incredulous people. "Strange that, among a people who had amongst them the records of all the 'mighty deeds' done for them by the finger of Jehovah in the days of their fathers, there should have existed the slightest surmise of impossibility, or even of difficulty, in regard to any assurance of good coming from *him*. On many occasions was the incredulity, both of individuals in what regarded themselves, and of the community in what regarded the public interests, met with a similar rebuke" [*Wardlaw*].

Vers. 7, 8. *Israel's restoration* 1. They shall be gathered together into the kingdom of God. "Not to the earthly Jerusalem, that not large enough for Jews scattered throughout all the world, but to the open and enlarged Jerusalem in ch. ii. 8, *i. e.* the Messianic kingdom of God" [*Keil*]. 2. They shall become God's people, and God will again become their God. 3. This new relation shall not be as the past; a new feature is given by which the future will be distinguished "in truth and righteousness." A father may chastise a son for disobedience, put him into temporary seclusion and disgrace, and then restore him. God will never disown his relation to Israel, but eventually bless them more than ever in Christ.

HOMILETICS.

Courage in Duty.—*Verses* 9—15.

The prophet now urges the people to be courageous in their work. Adversity formerly attended them for neglect of duty, but God will henceforth bestow blessings, which are but the earnest of greater ones which await those who return to God. The grounds for courage are distinctly given.

I. **The words of the prophets.** "Ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets." Ever since they had commenced to build God had exhorted them in their work and assured them that it would be finished. Special messengers sent to stir us up and predict success ought to encourage. It is a privilege to hear the prophets, and a sure way to prosperity to believe them (2 Chron. xx. 20). II. **The prospect of better days.** Before, they were hindered in their work; man and beast laboured in vain. But bright is the future if they will be strong. 1. *Great rewards for labour.* "There was no hire for man, nor hire for beast." Produce was expected, waited for, but came not (Hag. i. 10). "Man must be disappointed with the lesser things of life before he can comprehend the full value of the greater" [*Bulwer Lytton*]. 2. *Abundant temporal prosperity.* The seed will be healthy and the harvests fruitful. The earth will give its increase and the heaven its dew. No failure nor famine, no poverty nor distress. There will be seed to the sower and bread to the eater. 3. *Entire security from foes.* Neither discord within nor invasion without will disturb their peace and security. They will dwell together in unity and labour without fear. Their disposition will be peaceful and their country secure. "Peace is rarely denied to the peaceful" [*Schiller*]. 4. *Complete reversal of fortunes.* "I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days." If we return to duty God will visit us in favour. The curse shall be turned into a blessing, and we shall be saved from dispersion and dishonour. God will dwell with us without fear and reproach. "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord; thoughts of peace, and not of evil." III. **The pledge of God's help.** "Again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem." God had determined, purposed to help. 1. *God's work*

is explicit. "*Fear* not," "let your hands be strong." Fear makes the heart faint, and when the heart is feeble the hands can never be strong. When the spirit is timid and irresolute we have neither energy in body nor mind to work. Confidence will brace up the energies, and the joy of the Lord will be our strength. 2. *God's faithfulness is unchangeable.* His word was true to the fathers. He "repented not." If faithful to his threatenings, will he not be to his promises? Punishment long suspended came at length. Those who would not hear were made to feel that God's denunciations were not empty words. So "all that God is, and all that God has, are alike pledged in the promises of his covenant," says Wardlaw, "to do good to his confiding and obedient people." "Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

PAST AND PRESENT, OR ONCE A CURSE AND NOW A BLESSING.—*Verse* 13.

These words apply to all the tribes of Israel—have been partially fulfilled. For generations Jews have been cursed by all people, but a more glorious accomplishment will be in the future. They might be taken literally, but apply them in another sense.

I. God's people have once been a curse. 1. When *unconverted*, many were a curse in their influence and example. Their lives, if not openly wicked, were a hindrance to everything good. "One sinner destroyeth much good." 2. When *chastised* by God they were in a sense cursed. From the first a curse and a blessing were set before Israel, and the result was according to their choice (Deut. xi. 26; xxx. 1). But God's people disobey, and are corrected by sufferings. 3. When *persecuted* they are cursed. They are ridiculed for their profession, and often become a by-word and a proverb (Jer. xxiv. 9). They are thought to be "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." "Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us" (Ps. xliv. 13, 14). **II. God's people are now a blessing.** "Ye shall be a blessing." 1. They are *blessed in their own experience.* They are renewed and forgiven. They enjoy the presence and the favour of God. "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." 2. They are *the means of blessing others.* In their influence and example, prayers and efforts, good men are a blessing. As the Jew was a source of blessing to the Gentile, so is the Christian to the world. "I will bless thee and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 9. 1. The privilege. Hearing the words of the prophets. 2. The duty. "Let your hands be strong." "Those only who are employed for God may expect to be encouraged by him; those who lay their hands to the plough of duty shall have them strengthened with the promises of mercy."

Ver. 10. 1. Those who neglect God's work will not always succeed in their own. "There was no hire for man." Neither can they always expect peace and prosperity. "There was no peace to him that went out." 2. Outward troubles and civil discord may be judgments from God, in which his hand should be specially recognized. "*I* set all men," &c. God's holy hand hath a special stroke in the Church's afflictions, whosoever be the instrument. Herein is all-disposing Providence not only permissive, but active. "I make peace and create evil," that is, war and contention (Isa. xlv. 7), which is called evil by a speciality, as including all evils. This God doth—1. By letting loose Satan upon them (that great kindle-coal and make-bate of the world) to raise jealousies, heart-burnings, and discontents between them. 2. By giving them up to the lusts and corruptions of their own wicked hearts. 3. By giving occasions

of enraging them more and more one against another [*Trapp*].

Ver. 11. *I will cause.* Whereas people are apt to attribute too much to means and second causes of plenty and prosperity, God assumes the honour of all to himself. Rain and fruitful seasons are his gift (Acts xiv. 17). He resolveth the genealogy of corn and wine unto himself (Hos. ii. 22); and both here and elsewhere he giveth us to know that the reward of religion is abundance of outward blessings, which yet are not always entailed to godliness, to the end that it may be admired for itself, and not for these transitory trappings [*Trapp*].

Vers. 14, 15. Past sorrows pledges of future good. How? 1. Because past sorrows inflicted to prevent future evil. 2. Because past sorrows prove God's unchangeable purpose and love. "So have I turned and purposed," &c. "The illustrations of God's severity will be surpassed by those of his goodness" [*Lange*]. His chastisements were the earnest of his mercies, for they too were an austere form of his love [*Pusey*].

Fear not. 1. Grounds of apprehension. 2. Grounds of confidence.

HOMILETICS.

Moral Conditions of Prosperity.—*Verses* 16, 17.

These verses contain a virtual and instructive reply to the question relative to the celebration of the fast (chap. vii. 3). It was not in such merely external, ritual, or ceremonial observances, that Jehovah delighted; but in the love and practice of moral rectitude [*Henel.*]. In verses 14 and 15 we have the grounds upon which God's promise rests; here, the conditions upon which it will be fulfilled. There are two aspects of duty as essential to prosperity.

I. **Sympathy with our fellow-creatures.** We are forbidden—1. *To act evil.* "Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates." Nothing must be done in partiality, violence, and passion. In public administration and private intercourse we must allay feuds and seek peace. 2. *To speak evil.* "Speak ye every man the truth." (*a*) *In social intercourse.* "To his neighbour." (*b*) *In public courts.* "Love no false oath." "Truth is the band of union, and the basis of human happiness. Without this virtue there is no reliance upon language, no confidence in friendship, no security in promises and oaths" [*Jeremy Collier*]. 3. *To think evil.* "Let none of you imagine evil in your hearts." All evil springs from the thoughts. The most secret sins and the most grievous acts begin there. "To think well," says *Paley*, "is the way to act well." "The thoughts of the righteous are right" (Prov. xii. 5). II. **Moral conformity to God.** "All these things" forbidden, are evils which God hates, and will punish. Therefore we should hate and avoid them also; shun them, not for the sake of policy, nor propriety, but as offensive to God. Men are seeking to substitute philanthropy for piety; "the claims of humanity" for the worship of God. But Scripture and experience prove that there can be no true and permanent love to man, which is not the offspring of love to God. The test of our character and the degree of our prosperity will be according to our conformity to God. If we love what he loves, and hate what he hates, we shall bear his image and become his children. "For love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God."

Fasts Turned into Festive Joy.—*Verses* 18, 19.

These words are fresh grounds for encouragement.

I. **Their mourning will be turned into gladness.** Their seasons of sorrow and penitential confession should end in feasting and praise. They would be delivered from foreign yoke, and brought back to their own land; restored from spiritual

desolation to the privileges of the temple. Personally and socially, joy and gladness would be great. Troublous times often end in joyous songs to the Church. After the night of weeping, the morning dawns in light and cheerfulness. "They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." II. This gladness will lead to sincerity of life. "*Therefore*, love the truth and peace." God blesses his people, that they may love him. The greater his promises, the greater should be our obedience. Fasts and feasts are empty forms. God requires truth in our life, and peace in our hearts. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

"Truth is always straightforward" [*Sophocles*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 19. Mark the practical improvement. "*Therefore, love the truth and peace.*" The words may be taken in two senses: First, as an appeal to *gratitude*, as if Jehovah had said, "You owe your deliverance *to me.*" You deserved it not. You never could have wrought it for yourselves. It is all my doing. If, therefore, you feel as you ought; thankful to your covenant God for my interposing on your behalf, think of my will, and henceforward attend to what you know will be pleasing in my sight: "love the truth and peace." Secondly, as an appeal to *self-love*—an appeal grounded on a regard to *their own interests:* as if he had said, "You have been suffering for your own and your fathers' sins. You have been delivered. If you would shun a repetition of the sufferings—if you would continue in possession of your now restored land and liberty, and temporal and spiritual blessings—'love the truth and peace.' Love them in heart: show love to them in practice. It is thus only that you can retain my favour and blessing; thus only that your days can be prolonged upon the land which the Lord your God has again given you" [*Wardlaw*].

Truth and peace, twin virtues. Observe — 1. *Their connection.* Truth should be sought, maintained, and diffused in a peaceful spirit. 2. *Their order.* Truth first, and then peace. Trust must not be compromised for the sake of peace. It is not peace on any terms. "If it be possible (it may not be so always), as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

"Truth hath a quiet breast" [*Shakespeare*].

HOMILETICS.

THE FUTURE PROSPERITY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.—*Verses* 20—23.

The ordinary reference of these words is to Gospel times, and, in part, to the Gospel dispensation of the future. They express the obligations to be felt and owned by the whole world—by "men of every kindred, and people, and nation, and tongue"—to the Jews, for the knowledge, the worship, and the practice of true religion [cf. *Wardlaw*]. The text contains a wonderful description of future prosperity to the Church of God.

I. Multitudes will be converted to God. "Many people and strong nations shall come." The few and feeble Jews shall increase into a mighty nation. "*Many* shall come from the east and the west, from the north and the south." Bigotry says *few*. Modern Scribes and Pharisees say *few*; but God says many. Every fresh conversion shall win others, until "all nations flow' into God's kingdom. II. Multitudes will be converted to God by the instrumentality of the Jews. "Ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations of the skirt of him that is a Jew." 1. *Nations shall feel indebted to the Jews.* Their outward polity has decayed, and they have been scattered and despised for centuries; but the

world will yet own its obligation to them. Other nations have given science and art, government and laws; but to the Jews are we indebted for a knowledge of God, and the preservation of his Word. "What advantage then hath the Jew? Much every way; chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (cf. Rom. iii. 2; ix. 4, 5). 2. *Nations shall discern that God is with the Jews.* "For we have heard that God is with you." God has not cast off his ancient people, but still watches over them. The report of his deeds among them shall spread. They shall be gathered and honoured, and other nations will be anxious to participate in their blessings. All people shall yet testify in their favour. "Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people; all they that see them shall acknowledge them that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed."

A Call to God's House.—*Verses* 21, 22.

Take Jerusalem here literally or spiritually, the words may be regarded as a call to Christian worship. God has put his name in his house. It shall be attractive to all sincere believers, and in whatever place they reside they shall come to the great festivals of the future.

I. The purpose for which they come. Not to play nor pass away the time; not for any secular, but a spiritual end. 1. *They go to pray before the Lord.* Prayer is the language of dependence and entreaty. Men feel that nothing can satisfy but God—are led to give up every kind of idolatry and come to him, believing that he will hear prayer. Prayer is most important, and most necessary, yet meetings for united prayer are neglected. If the spirit of prayer be not with a people, there can be no life and unity. 2. *They go to seek the Lord.* God pre-eminently displays grace and glory in his house. True worshippers covet his favour, and long for his fellowship. They regard God in everything. They earnestly seek to behold his power and glory in his sanctuary (Ps. lxiii. 2). Through the veil of ceremonies they look to the Invisible One. "This is the generation of those that seek him." II. The method in which they come. "Many people and strong nations," &c. 1. *In great numbers.* At present the ways of Zion mourn. Few attend the house of God, and like sparrows are alone upon the house-top. As in ancient times, Jews went from village to village, gathering numbers and singing hymns as they journeyed on, until all appeared in Zion before God: so shall multitudes say, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob" (Isa. ii. 3). 2. *In great variety.* "The inhabitants of many cities." Country and townspeople, merchants and mechanics, masters and servants, shall come. "Men out of all languages of the nations"—the Mahomedan and the Turk, the Hindoo and the Hottentot, Greek and Jew, shall yet meet together in the house of God. III. The spirit in which they come. 1. *A spirit of mutual excitement.* The inhabitants of one city go to another. They do not invite those whom they accidentally meet on the way, nor do they wait for the minister and the missionary to do their work. They go to the negligent—perhaps at some sacrifice and inconvenience—and stir one another up. This is needful now. Frivolous are the excuses, and unjustifiable the causes, which keep men from the house of God. 2. *A spirit of personal resolve.* "I will go also," was the response of each when invited. Many excuse; they have no time, no clothes, and you must call again. But others are only waiting for an invitation. Let us all resolve with Nehemiah and his friends: "We will not forsake the house of our God." 3. *A spirit of earnestness.* "Let us go speedily." (*a*) *Go with heartiness.* Put heart and feeling into your work. Angels are like flaming fire in their service. We are dull and half-asleep. (*b*) *Go without delay.* Many delay and never go. They never begin to pray, till God has ceased to hear.

Let all attend and take others to the house of God—pray that God would revive his work, and bless our souls. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 20, 21. Characteristics of a genuine revival. 1. A general interest in the house of God. 2. A mutual concern for each other's welfare. 3. An earnest resolve for individual duty; and 4. A great accession to the Christian Church.

The inhabitants, &c. They shall not be satisfied with their own salvation, careless about the salvation of others; they shall employ all labour and industry, with wondrous love, to provide for the salvation of others as if it were their own. It is a marvellous stirring of minds [*Pusey*]. Learn also—1. That those who know God will seek to bring others to know him. 2. That mutual stirring up to duty is a means of increase to the Church. 3. That in this work we should not be discouraged. (1) *Sad times* should not blot out remembrance of the Church's charter and future privileges. (2) *Personal sacrifices* should not tire nor dishearten us. Indifference and lukewarmness are out of place. We must be active and constant in the work. "Let us go speedily."

I will go also. I. The object of the awakened sinner. To seek God. II. The means of accomplishing this object. (1) Attendance in sanctuary. (2) Prayer. III. The influence of example in pursuing this object. Inciting others. Individual example connected with general exhortation.

Ver. 23. A revived people. 1. Blessed with God's presence. 2. Instrumental in the conversion of others.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VIII.

Vers. 1, 2. *Jealous.* Love often re-illumines his extinguished flame at the torch of jealousy [*Lady Blessington*]. Jealousy is always born with love, but does not always die with it [*Rochefoucauld*].

Ver. 3. *City of truth.* Justice is the idea of God, the ideal of man, the rule of conduct writ in the nature of mankind [*Theodore Parker*]. Great is truth and mighty above all things (Esd. iv. 51).

Vers. 4, 5. Here is a fine picture. The scene is the streets of Jerusalem. For it is clear that in this connexion, the word rendered "*dwell*" is decidedly to be understood as meaning "*sit.*" *Longevity*, when in any country it is found on a more than ordinary average, is a proof of a healthful and prosperous condition of society; and although I am satisfied that some passages of Scripture which have been interpreted of personal longevity have reference rather to the long-continued national possession of the land of promise; yet that longevity is included amongst the promises of temporal blessing and well-being, there can be little doubt. "Thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel," is one of not a few similar assurances. The state described is one of peace and tranquil security [*Wardlaw*].

Ver. 6. *Marvellous.* The man who cannot wonder, who does not habitually wonder and worship, were he president of innumerable royal societies, is but a pair of spectacles behind which there is no eye [*Carlyle*].

"Wonder is involuntary praise" [*Young*].

Ver. 8. *In truth.* God's relation sustained from the time of having chosen them had been *always* thus characterized. Not so *theirs.* They called God *their God*, and themselves *his people;* while too often it was neither "in truth" nor "in righteousness;" but when their hearts and lives gave the lie to their lips; when they flagrantly played the hypocrite, and defrauded him of his due, both in inward devotion and in

outward service. Let us see that our professions are sincere—that our hearts are steadfast [*Wardlaw*].

Ver. 9. *Strong.*

"Fear is the virtue of slaves: but the heart that loveth is willing" [*Longfellow*].

Vers. 10—12. *Fruit.* Interesting and lovely as the green fields in their luxuriant riches must ever be, to the eye of faith and devotion they are even more so. Did we accustom ourselves to associate with their beauty the superintending providence of God, as well as the subordinate art and labour of man, they would possess an interest and a loveliness which the mere lover of nature never knew. The sweetest landscape is improved by the presence of animated objects, which impart a liveliness, an interest, as it were, an existence, to the whole. What increased force and interest are added to it by the presence, so to speak, of the living God [*Palin*].

Ver. 13. *Curse.*

"A curse is like a cloud,—it passes" [*Bailey*].

Vers. 14, 15. *Do well.* God is goodness itself; and whatsoever is good is of him [*Sir P. Sidney*]. God has been pleased to prescribe limits to his own power, and to work his ends within these limits [*Paley*].

Vers. 16, 17. *I hate.* Men resemble the gods in nothing so much as in doing good to their fellow-creatures [*Cicero*]. Every day should be distinguished by at least one particular act of love [*Lavater*].

Ver. 19. *Joy.* What is joy? A sunbeam between two clouds [*Madame Deluzy*]. Joy never feasts so high, as when the first course is of misery [*Suckling*].

Vers. 20—22. *Pray.* The gracious God is pleased to esteem it his glory to have many beggars thronging at the beautiful gate of his temple, for spiritual and corporal alms. What an honour it is to our Great Landlord that multitudes of tenants flock together to his house to pay their rent of thanks and worship for all which they hold of him! How loud and lovely is the noise of many golden trumpets! Good Lord, what an echo do they make in heaven's ears! When many skilful musicians play in concert with well-tuned and prepared instruments, the music cannot but be ravishing to God himself [*George Swinnock*].

Ver. 23. *Skirt.* This is a simple and striking expression. We have seen a dear little infant, when he wished to engage the attention of his mother, pulling her by the clothes. When a child has been walking along with his father, and afraid that he would leave him, he not only cries but lays hold of his coat. When the cripple had been healed at the beautiful gate of the temple, he held Peter and John, and was afraid to let them go (probably dreading a return of his former misery), as much as to say, "You shall not go, and if you do I will go with you, and you shall draw me after you." Just so is it here. It shows conviction, attachment, eager attention, a wishing to be among them and of them [*Jay*].

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Hadrach**] Part of Syria, near Damascus. **Rest**] On which God's wrath shall rest, and permanently abide. **Eyes**] of Israel, and of other people, would mark the providence of God; or, "Jehovah has an eye upon men, and upon all the tribes of Israel" (cf. Jer. xxxii. 23). **2. Hamath**] as adjoining Damascus partook in "the burden." Tyre and Sidon lay directly in Alexander's march along the Syrian coast towards Egypt (see Isa. xxiii.). **Wise**] in building strong holds, and heaping up silver (Ezek. xxviii. 3—17). **3.**] A description of new Tyre, an island 700 paces from the shore. **4. Cast**] Heb. dispossess, drive out her inhabitants. Alexander captured Tyre after seven months' siege; some few escaped; others put to death, or enslaved, and the city was

burned. **5.**] Principal cities of the Philistines given. Gath only left out, probably owing to its situation inland, lying out of the route of the army. The fall of Tyre terrified these capitals of different districts. If Tyre could not stand how could they? **Expect.**] Ekron, furthest north, expected Alexander would be checked at Tyre. **Gaza**] captured after a siege of two months. **Betis**, its governor, was bound to a chariot, and dragged round the city. **6. Ashdod**] A bastard (foreigner or stranger) of the conqueror's nominated ruler. **7. Blood**] of sacrifices, which heathens often drank. **Abominations**] Idolatrous offerings. "A prediction of future conversion of the Philistines to the knowledge and service of the true God. Their abandonment of idolatry, and their embracing the true religion, is represented by no longer drinking blood, and eating things sacrificed to idols, both of which were common among pagans, but prohibited by the Mosaic law, and by the apostles" (Numb. xxv. 2; Lev. vii. 6: Acts xv. 29) [*Henderson*]. **He**] The Philistines regarded as one. **Left**] Many Philistines became proselytes to Judaism, says Josephus. **Governor**] Philistine princes shall be like tribe-princes (*chiliarchs*) in Judah. There will be no distinction between proselytes and native Jews—all will enjoy equal honours and privileges. **Jebusites**] Original inhabitants of Jerusalem, subjugated by David, incorporated among Jews, and enjoyed their privileges (2 Sam. xxiv. 16). **8. House**] Jews, not to be injured by the army of Alexander on its march to or from Egypt. Fulfilled to the letter. Samaritans punished, but Jews escaped [cf. *Henderson*]. **Seen**] Lit. Now do I look with mine eyes. They were indebted to God's providence only. **9.**] A royal personage to appear without armies, and to reign without destructive judgments. **Daughter**] Theocratic nation to rejoice at the appearance of her *king* (Ps. ii. 11). **Thine**] *i. e.* the one promised and long expected. **Just**] in his official and personal character. An attribute of the Messiah in connection with salvation (Isa. xlv. 21; liii. 11: Jer. xxiii. 5, 6). **Lowly**] Expressing his general character, not merely his *humiliation* in first advent. **Colt**] A rough unbroken colt. An *ass* was not a mean and despised animal, but in triumphant processions horses were chosen, and arrayed in costly caparisons. **10.**] The nature and extent of Messiah's reign. **Cut off**] Remove instruments of war, and reign by peaceful means. **Ends of the earth**] Not a mere Jewish, but a universal, kingdom. **11. Blood**] The covenant sealed with sprinkled blood, the pledge. **Prisoners**] Jewish exiles in Egypt and Greece. **Pit**] An allusion to Gen. xxxvii. 24. Their distress great, like dungeons without water (Jer. xxxviii. 6). **12. Strong hold**] Fortress, forcibly contrasting with **pit** (Ps. xl. 2). **To-day**] No need to despair; their condition miserable, yet not hopeless. **Double**] Not strictly of *twice the quantity*, but simply of *great abundance*. A large amount of blessing far outweighing the misery of bondage [cf. *Wardlaw*]. **13.**] The method of victory represented figuratively. Judah, the extended bow; Ephraim, the arrow by which Jehovah would overcome the Grecians. **14—16.**] God's presence with his people. **Seen**] Conspicuously displaying power, like the pillar of old: seen like lightning, the arrows of God in a thunderstorm. **South**] (cf. Isa. xxi. 1: Hos. xiii. 5). Southern storms always most violent. 15. **Eat**] the flesh and drink the blood of the enemy, like a lion devouring its victim (Numb. xxiii. 24). **Subdue**] Lit. "tread underfoot the sling-stones," hurled by the foe. Missiles will not hinder their progress, but fall at their feet, and be trampled to the dust **Bowls**] of sacrifices. **Corners**] Horns of the altar, sprinkled with blood from the bowls (Ex. xxix. 12: Lev. iv. 18); priestly figures intimating holy war and victory. **16. Stones**] Gems in the crown of the conqueror; not the sling-stones trodden by the foot. **17. How great**] (exulting exclamation) in bestowing victory and fruitful seasons. **Corn** and **wine**] indicate peace and plenty to those pressed by the foe and pinched in circumstances (Deut. xxxiii. 28: Ps. iv. 8).

HOMILETICS.

JUDGMENTS UPON SYRIA AND PHŒNICIA.—*Verses* 1—4.

Judgments are now threatened upon the lands of Syria, Phœnicia, and Philistia. Nations from which Israel greatly suffered, typical of worldly powers exulting in their strength, and broken to pieces by the might of Jehovah.

I. **Judgments upon the land of Syria.** "In the land of Hadrach." 1. *Their nature.* "The *burden* of the word." The punishment of the land is burdensome; no light trifling matter. It is bitter and crushing. 2. *Their centre.* "Damascus," the capital, "shall be the rest thereof." On this city the burden was permanently to settle. Eminent places generally share in the guilt, and procure the punishment, of the land. After Alexander's victory over Darius in the battle of Issus, one of his generals was sent to the city, who took its immense wealth, treasured up by the Persian monarch, and carried away its satraps and princely families (cf. Jer. xlix. 23: Amos i. 3—5). 3. *Their extent.* "Hamath also, which borders thereon," did not escape. Near in situation, it shared in the burden of wrath resting upon Damascus. Contiguous in territory, they were alike in doom. The proverb of the Jews was realized, "Woe to the wicked man, and woe to his

neighbour." **II. Judgments upon the land of Phœnicia.** Tyre and Sidon, the two cap tals of Phœnicia, are next mentioned. Tyre was originally a colony of Sidon, but soon outgrew the mother city, and became the capital of all Phœnicia. Hence Tyre is only spoken of here. But the fate of both places is interwoven (cf. Isa. xxiii. 4—12: Ezek. xxviii. 21). 1. *Tyre could not be saved by its worldly wisdom.* "Though it be very wise." Volney says, that it was "a nursery of arts and science." Its wisdom consisted in building fortifications, multiplying riches, and trusting to them. It was worldly wisdom, the source of her pride and the means of her destruction. 2. *Tyre could not be saved by its worldly wealth.* "Though silver was heaped up as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets," yet this availed not. 3. *Tyre could not be saved by its mighty strongholds.* "Tyrus did build herself a stronghold." She had "the greatest confidence" in herself, says a historian, "owing to her insular position and fortifications, and the abundant stores she had prepared." She was "the crowning city," rivalling the world in strength, beauty, and riches. Her fleet was sunk in the sea, her fortifications overturned, and she was "devoured with the fire." The waves girt her round, buried her ruins, and now roll over her site. "I will make her like the top of a rock; it shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea; for I have spoken it."

Three Aspects of Divine Providence.—*Verse* 1.

When the eyes of man. Taking these words as they stand, they may mean that the events of God's providence would be such as to constrain men to acknowledge God's hand in them, or that the dangers would be so great to Israel that other nations would watch whether Jehovah, in whom they trusted, would be their protector. They are generally taken as indicating God's providence over all mankind, to punish the ungodly, and defend his people. In this sense—

I. Divine providence is universal. "The Lord hath an eye to man," *i. e.* to all mankind, as well as to the tribes of Israel. He controls and disposes the conquests of armies, and the destinies of nations, for the advancement of his glory. The providence is *the eye* of God. His look is not careless and transient; but scrutinizing and constant. "His eyes behold," without slumber or fatigue, the actions, words, and thoughts; "his eyelids try the children of men," as one intently examining some objects to the exclusion of all others (Ps. xi. 4). "All things are naked," stripped of all covering and concealment, "and opened before him"—laid prostrate, and exposed before his eye (Heb. iv. 13). **II. Divine providence is protective.** "As of all the tribes of Israel." He may chastise, but he will ever protect, his own. The victorious progress of Alexander terrified Israel, but Jerusalem escaped unhurt amid the storm. "This 'captain of the Lord's host' (Jos. v. 15) kept at bay the otherwise irresistible foe" [*Lange*]. **III. Divine providence is retributive.** It is a defence to Israel, and a punishment to others. Damascus was the rest; the region on which God's anger settled. He who chastises his people will not fail to visit other men's sins. Love seems hidden at times, and it may be difficult to see on which side favour lies; but the disproportion will not continue long. A distinction, an eternal separation, will be made at length. "Every eye shall see him" then, and all reap their reward. A difference will be made "between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *The eyes of man, &c.* 1. Times of trouble sent to direct men's eyes to God. 2. As God's providence is universal, those only can escape who trust him. 3. The punishment upon those who do not trust him will be heavy.

Divine wrath is sure to hit its mark, and sink those on whom it rests.

Vers. 2—4. Vain confidences. 1. *Reputed wisdom*, which is not "counsel against the Lord" (Prov. xxi. 30). 2. *Immense wealth*, which "profits not in the day of wrath" (Prov. xi. 4). "Misery assails riches, as lightning does the highest towers" [*Burton*]. 3. *Outward fortifications.* High walls and deep seas, instruments of power, may be elements of destruction. God can destroy the wisest, the wealthiest, and the strongest nation. Tyre said in her pride, "I sit *in the seat of God*, in the *midst of the seas*" (Ezek. xxviii. 2); but she was devoured with fire. "How art thou destroyed, which wast strong in the sea" (Ezek. xxvi. 17).

Ver. 4. Mark the language. *Who* was to "smite her power in the sea, burn her with fire, and cast her out?" Alexander the Great, says history; *Jehovah*, says Divine revelation. Both are true. Only revelation keeps us in mind that "men are God's hand"—a truth which profane history is too prone to overlook and forget; as indeed we ourselves — all of us — naturally are [*Wardlaw*].

HOMILETICS.

Judgments upon Philistia.—*Verses* 5—7.

The prophet now turns to the inveterate enemies of Israel, and mentions four capitals of the Philistines. Their country lay between Tyre (or Phœnicia) and Egypt, the south-east of the Mediterranean Sea. What is said of one may be said of all, and the fate of the different cities corresponds with the prediction.

I. The cities lost their rulers. "The king shall perish from Gaza." The Persians set up petty kings as vassals to their superior control. Notwithstanding two months' siege, Gaza was taken, its inhabitants sold, and put to death. Betis, its brave king, was most cruelly fastened to the chariot of the conqueror, and dragged through the streets. **II. The cities were depopulated.** "A foreigner shall sit as ruler in Ashdod." They lost their native people, and were filled with a mongrel breed. At first a stranger was nominated to govern in *Ashdod;* but eventually "the inhabitant shall be cut off from Ashdod." *Ashkelon*, once noted for its figs and fertility, though dismantled and re-fortified several times, is now surrounded with desolate ruins of former grandeur. **III. The cities were bereft of their religion.** They shall no longer glut themselves with bloodsheddings. The prey of their gods was taken from their mouths. "I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth." There was not mere suspension but total abolition of their idolatry. They lost their religion and their nationality, and were incorporated with the Jews. **IV. The cities were desolated.** "I will cut off the pride of the Philistines." Their *hopes* were "cut off;" for Tyre did not check Alexander's triumphant march. Their *fortifications* were "cut off," and levelled to the ground. Everything in which they prided themselves, strength, situation, wealth, and nationality, were "cut off." The day of wrath came, and all was swept like chaff before the whirlwind. The desolate ruins now declare that God is a consuming fire. "For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation; they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon-day, and Ekron shall be *rooted up*" (Zeph. ii. 4).

A Converted Remnant of Philistia.—*Verse* 7.

Just as God left a remnant for himself in Israel when judgment fell upon them, so a remnant shall be left for God in Philistia. "But he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God."

I. The remnant was preserved from destruction. Some remained after judg-

ments had swept the land, and were converted to God. Monuments of grace and mercy set apart for him. From all nations God will gather his people. Nothing shall be a barrier to acceptance with him. "The son of the stranger that hath joined himself to the Lord" (Isa. lvi. 3). **II. The remnant was incorporated with Israel.** There would be no distinction between the Israelite and the Philistine. 1. *Dignity* would be conferred upon them. Their honour and elevation before God and the people "shall be as a governor in Judah." 2. *Equal privileges* would be conferred upon them. "And Ekron as a Jebusite." Jebusites were incorporated with Jews, and enjoyed equal honours and rights (2 Sam. xxiv. 16). In Christ Jesus there is no distinction of race nor sect. All are one in him, and alike welcome to him. The proselytes under the Maccabean dynasty, were only a partial fulfilment of the text. Heathens shall yet be converted, and be joined to God's people. "The strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob" (cf. Isa. xiv. 1; lvi. 8).

THE DIVINE ENCAMPMENT.—*Verses* 8, 9.

While neighbouring nations are destroyed, a promise of Divine protection is made to the Jews. Their nationality would be preserved, and all their sufferings would turn out for good. For this they were indebted to God, who encamped about them, and watched over them.

I. The Christian Church is surrounded by enemies. She is in the battle-field, and at war with all ungodliness. Enemies seek to oppress and subdue her—pass by and return. There is marching and counter-marching, with a design to attack. Powers of darkness invade our spheres of action, and encamp within us. In this moral campaign the fight is indispensable, holy, and severe. "The good fight of faith." **II. The Christian Church is defended by God.** "I will encamp about mine house." It is not a mere visit, but an *encampment*, a dwelling or settlement. 1. *God watches over her.* "Now have I seen with mine eyes." Some think that he does not see at all, or only looks when he interferes. But he ever beholds the insolence of the enemy, and the sufferings of his people—will judge the one and avenge the other. "Awake to help me, and behold." 2. *God delivers her.* "No oppressor shall pass through them any more." Alexander punished the Samaritans, but favoured the Jews. No foreigners invaded the land before the advent of Messiah, as Assyrians and Chaldeans had done of old. God guarded them, like "the chariots of fire and horses of fire round about Elisha." The power and goodness of God are pledged for the triumph and salvation of his Church. On every side the watch is kept with sleepless eyes. None can resist the Captain of the Lord of Hosts. "The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." **III. The Christian Church should rejoice in this defence.** To show the magnitude and the consequences of this salvation, Zion is called upon to "rejoice" and "shout" for joy in the prospect before her (ver. 9). If the presence of Alexander, Cæsar, or Wellington, created joy in the camp; what confidence should the presence of God inspire! Napoleon's oversight was remarkable, Cromwell's interest in his men was great; but God says, "Rejoice greatly." Cowardice in God's presence is doubly criminal. "Cowards falter," said Queen Elizabeth, "but danger is often overcome by those who nobly dare." "Fear not, daughter of Sion" (John xii. 15).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 7. *He that remaineth.* The elect remnant. 1. From whom chosen. 2. To what promoted. *Ekron as a Jebusite*, as a denizen of Jerusalem; no longer an enemy, or a stranger and foreigner, but a fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God. Two things in this promise. 1. *It is a*

great thing to be a Jebusite. One of the highest of all privileges to "come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God." What a governor have these citizens! What a charter have they! What can equal their safety, liberty, and defence? —their commerce, wealth, happiness, and peace? Their joy is unspeakable, and full of glory. 2. *Jebusites may be derived from Ekronites.* The thing has been done; and most unlikely characters have furnished pious converts — Manasseh, the dying thief, and the murderers of Jesus, prove this. What surpassed the guilt and depravity of the Corinthians? What says Paul of his own conversion? What triumphs of the riches, freeness, and power of Divine grace! Let none despair, however desperate his own case—nor despond with regard to any of our fellow-creatures. God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham [*Jay*].

Ver. 8. *The house of Jehovah.* The workmanship, the residence, and the property of God. *The camp of God, the deliverance of the good.* "*Seen with mine eyes.*" With God, compassion is so intrinsic an attribute, that he is pictured as looking away when he does not put it forth. With God, to behold is to help [*Pusey*]. Hence God sees with approval and tender consideration —with a design to help his people, and punish their foes. He is an observant God—eyes and ears are set upon men— "in every place beholding the evil and the good."

HOMILETICS.

The Peaceful King and his Glorious Reign.—*Verses* 9, 10.

From the Grecian conqueror, and the temporal protection which Jehovah would accord to his people, the prophet abruptly (*by the prophetic law of suggestion, Fausset*), and in the most sublime and animated strain, calls the attention of the Jews to a Royal Personage of a very different character, *the Messiah*, meek and righteous, the Prince and pattern of peace, and the author of spiritual salvation to all his subjects. His advent was to be accompanied by such glorious results that it was to be hailed with the most joyful anticipation [*Hend.*].

I. **The character of the King.** The features refer to his personal and official character. 1. *He is a righteous ruler.* "He is just." Just himself, and the means of justifying others before God. In character, principle, and practice, he is a righteous King. His administrations in providence and grace are conducted by laws of pure and unbending righteousness. Truth and uprightness are fixed on his throne. "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints." 2. *He is a benevolent ruler.* "Having salvation." Take these words actively or passively, he had power over death and the grave. He finished his work, rose to the right hand of God, and bestows gifts upon men. The design of his death was to honour God, and render salvation consistent with the claims of righteousness, that he might be "a just God and a Saviour" (cf. Rom. iii. 26). He bestows *salvation* in its beginning here, and in its results hereafter. "The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." 3. *He is a lowly ruler.* "Lowly, and riding upon an ass." He had no war-horse richly caparisoned, and tossing his arched neck—no imperial chariot, like Alexander. He was not cruel like Nero, nor proud like Herod, in disposition. He was lowly in his intercourse and triumphs. He linked greatness with humility, performed menial service to his disciples, and set himself as an example to all men. "Learn of me; for I am meek, and lowly in heart."

"Gentleness! more powerful than Hercules" [*Catherine II.*].

II. **The nature of his kingdom.** It is not that of a worldly conqueror, nor is it confined to Jewish lands. It is peaceful, universal, and perpetual. 1. *It is a peaceful kingdom.* The symbol would remind the Jews of the prediction concern-

ing "The Prince of Peace" (Isa. ix. 6). No wars nor bloodshed were to disturb his reign. "Peace hath its victories no less renowned than war." Notice—That he was not to *teach* peace, nor *command* it; but to *accomplish* by a word, what earthly kings cannot do by force. "He shall *speak* peace." He announces reconciliation to Jew and Gentile, and in his Word proclaims, "Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near." 2. *It is a universal kingdom.* It is more extensive than the kingdom of Macedon, greater than that of "the Emperor of All the Russias." As Solomon ruled the land of promise, and left no unconquered spot; so shall the Son of David reign "from sea to sea—from the Atlantic to the Pacific"—from the river "unto the ends of the earth." His subjects gathered from "all nations, and kindreds, and people," no man can number. "Yea, all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him." 3. *It is a perpetual kingdom.* Solomon's reign came to an end, and Alexander's empire was divided by his successors; but the throne of Christ shall endure for ever. "*Son culte se rajeunira sans cesse,*" wrote Renan. Suns may set, and moons may fade, but "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed." **III. The blessings of his reign.** "Rejoice greatly." 1. *Great joy.* The prophet, under the impulse of inspiration, invites the people to hail the coming of Messiah, in terms of exulting joy. "*Shout,* O daughter of Jerusalem!" It is not "a reign of terror," but of happiness and joy. "I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying." 2. *Perfect security.* Freedom from the power and corruption of sin to the believer, protection and prosperity to all nations, are offered by his Word. He is King both of righteousness and peace. Many usurp the throne, league with craft, and rule in tyranny and oppression. Hence kings are dethroned, kingdoms short-lived, and subjects insecure. Happy and safe are his people. "He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor."

DELIVERANCE FROM THE PIT.—*Verse* 11.

These words may be an invitation to Jewish exiles to return from the bondage of Egypt and Greece. But they relate to the spiritual conquests of the Messiah, and are the pledge of Jehovah to him, that his people (*thy prisoners*) shall be delivered from distress, exult in freedom, and through the blood of the covenant anticipate the blessings of the future.

I. The moral condition. Prisoners were confined in dungeons or pits dug for the purpose. Jeremiah was left to sink in the mire, and perish from thirst in the pit (xxxviii. 6). The pit indicates—1. *Deep distress.* "Wherein is no water." Men are restless and dissatisfied—distressed by sin and the world, a broken law, and an accusing conscience. Estrangement from God brings anguish of soul. "What exile from himself can flee?" asks Byron. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" 2. *Great darkness.* Prisoners sit in darkness as well as in distress. The spiritual light of this world is darkness. The wisest only grope in uncertainty. Sinners walk in darkness, and live under the powers of darkness. Heaven above is shrouded in gloom, round about and within them dwells no light, and before them hangs the shadow of death (cf. Ps. cvii. 10). The Sun of Righteousness never penetrates their hearts. Their condition is like an Eastern sepulchre—"a land of darkness, as darkness itself, without any order" (Job x. 22). 3. *Utter helplessness.* Neither Joseph nor Jeremiah could get out of the pit. Captives in a dungeon cannot escape. Cursed by the law, and condemned before God, immured in darkness and degradation, men are ready to perish. "God hath concluded (*shut* up as in a prison) them all (all mankind) in unbelief, the consequence

of disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all" (Rom. ii. 32). **II. The price of deliverance from the pit.** "By the blood of the covenant." 1. *A covenant of blood.* The Jews were delivered through the covenant made at Sinai, and sealed with blood. In redemption there is no remission of sins without shedding of blood. But "the blood of bulls and of goats" could not take away sin. Ancient sacrifices were mere shadows, had to be repeated, and were inefficient. The blood of man is not required, and will not avail. "None of them by any means can redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." Christ alone can deliver us. "In whom we have redemption through his blood." 2. *A covenant without change.* The price paid will not be required again. It avails for this and every age. Father and Son have taken solemn oaths, and sealed it by sacrifice. Nature's covenant abides firm as heaven and earth. The Jewish covenant was not disannulled by the sins of the people. God's purpose in Christ shall be realized. "*For thee also*" thy prisoners shall be delivered. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. They are incapable of being regretted, revoked, or changed (cf. *Vaughan*, Acts xi. 29). "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you, concerning all these words." **III. The method of deliverance from the pit.** "I have sent forth." A beautiful expression, indicating—1. *Mighty power.* Nothing but God's power can lift us up out of the horrible pit and miry clay, set our feet upon a rock, and establish our goings. 2. *Wonderful grace.* "*I* have sent forth." God might have left us in the pit; but he is gracious, and "saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom." 3. *Perfect liberty.* Not only lifted out, but "*sent forth*" without fear or foe, like Peter from prison. "That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 9. Here we have — 1. *The Divine in the form of the human.* 2. *The majestic in the form of the mean.* The dignity is royal. "Thy *king* cometh." Royalty surpassing all others. 3. *The victorious by means of the moral.* A king, but not the *kind* the Jews expected. His sceptre from heaven, and his glory gained through suffering. He had to borrow the colt, and who were his guards and attendants in his entrance in Jerusalem? (cf. Matt. xxi. 5: John xii. 15). In the whole history of Jesus we have a wonderful combination of humiliation and grandeur.

Vers. 9, 10. Messiah is King of Zion. Happy the subjects who dwell under his shadow. He rules them, not with a rod of iron by which he bruises and breaks the power of his enemies, but with his golden sceptre of love. He reigns by his own right, and by their full and free consent in their hearts. He reigns upon a throne of grace, to which they at all times have access, and from whence they receive the pardon of all their sins, grace to help in time of need, and a renewed supply answerable to all their wants, cares, services, and conflicts [*John Newton*].

Notice—1. *The Great King.* 2. *The wonderful kingdom.* 3. *The strange way in which he comes to possess it.* "Riding upon an ass," &c. Majesty veiled in meekness, justice blended with mercy, drawing the attention, and receiving the homage, of multitudes. 4. *The method by which he spreads it.* "I will cut off the chariot," &c.

Ver. 11. The sinner's condition by nature, and his rescue by grace. *The pit* dark, dismal, and deep. "The pit of corruption," or putrefaction and filth (Isa. xxxviii. 17). *The release*, condescending, reaching to the *depth*; and free, "sent forth." "They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me. I called upon thy name, O Lord; out of the low dungeon thou hast heard my voice." *Covenant.* The covenant love of God, and his faithful promise, sealed with blood, are the hope of the Church in time of trouble [*Lange*]. The word suggests

thoughts of grace, privilege, and security, not attained in any other way. Our trust for this world and the next, not upon the voices of nature or conclusions of reason, but upon the promise of God —a promise which he hath chosen to present in the form of a compact, with stipulations (and sometimes when the stipulations were all on one side, Gen. ix. 9), and not only so, but to confirm it by sacrifice [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

PRISONERS OF HOPE.—*Verses* 11, 12.

With the promise of release is connected the duty of the captives to embrace the opportunity of returning to their own land, where they would enjoy the protection and favour of Jehovah.

I. There is no imprisonment without hope. "Prisoners of hope." 1. *To saints in trouble.* In trials and straits they must maintain hope. 2. *To sinners in wickedness.* A stronghold is provided for all; secure from the stroke of offended justice, and from the attack of the foe. "No case is desperate. None should despair or say, "Our hope is lost." "I would not despair unless I knew the irrevocable decree was passed, saw my misfortune in the book of fate, and signed and sealed by necessity" [*J. Collier*] **II. There are grounds for hope in the provisions of Divine mercy.** 1. *In the atonement of Christ.* In the covenant blood we have every hindrance removed, and every means provided for the salvation of man. 2. *In the promise of Scripture.* "I will render double unto thee." Grace to convert and strengthen, the Holy Spirit to teach and direct, are offered. Blessings double in themselves, and as pledges of others. 3. *In the stronghold provided.* The height (Ps. xviii. 30) is prepared, the rock contrasting with the pit. The Rock of our Salvation immovable and inaccessible. Low defences are soon scaled, and weak ones soon destroyed. But this refuge is eternally secure. Its sanctity none can invade, its power none destroy. **III. Men are urged to avail themselves of these provisions.** Hope should inspire our hearts in danger, and prompt us to get out of it. 1. *They are commanded to escape.* "*Turn ye* to the stronghold." Divine authority and affection are set forth in the prediction. 2. *Escape should be made immediately.* "Even to-day." The Jews were not to wait for future opportunity, when all might return together. While there was hope, individually they must hasten, and make no delay. To-morrow may be too late. To see the light of day fade away is sad, but much worse to lose hope for eternity. Flee "for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you."

Ye prisoners of hope. This title is not a fanciful one. To the Jew it had a triple significance. 1. He was under the yoke of a foreign despot, and longed to regain his freedom. 2. He was under the yoke of an unfulfilled promise, and yearned for the "day star to arise." 3. He was under the yoke of the unrealized prophecies concerning the glory of the Messiah's kingdom, and the eternal felicity of his followers. The words of the text are the true designation of every Christian.

I. We are prisoners to an unredeemed body (cf. Rom. viii. 23). Observe—1. *There is a sense in which the body is already redeemed.* 2. *There is another sense in which our bodies are not redeemed.* (*a*) They are not yet free from manifold infirmities. (*b*) Not yet redeemed from sensuous appetites. (*c*) Not yet redeemed from the dominion of death. 3. *Hope anticipates the possession of an immortal body.* (*a*) From which every element of weakness and infirmity is excluded. (*b*) In which carnal appetites shall have no place. (*c*) Which shall be no more subject to death. **II. We are prisoners to a limited and superficial knowledge.** "Now I know in part"—there is bondage. "Then shall I know even as I am known"—there is freedom. 1. *Our knowledge touches not the essence, but only the phenomena.* 2. *Reaches men not as they are, only as they appear*

3. *Is limited by the brevity of life, and the conditions of its existence.* 4. Hope anticipates the solution of the dark enigma of human life. **III. We are prisoners to a circumscribed Christian fellowship.** The great family of God is sadly dismembered. 1. *Doctrinal divergence.* 2. *Suspicion*, the offspring of imperfect knowledge. 3. *Social status* is a barrier to fellowship. 4. *Distance and death* contribute to limit the measure of fellowship. 5. Hope anticipates the universal and perfect fellowship of saints. (*a*) This will include all ages; (*b*) all climes; (*c*) all classes and creeds. **IV. We are prisoners to an imperfect vision of Christ.** "We see through a glass darkly," and through "a mirror in an enigma" [*Lange*]. Yet note—1. Christ is really apprehended by faith even here. 2. This vision is a test, a dim one. 3. Human nature in its present state is not capable of a more open vision. 4. Hope anticipates not only an immediate vision of Christ, but a nature capable of beholding it. *Lessons.* 1. This hope inspires the heavenward pilgrim—(*a*) with patience "to endure as seeing him," &c. (*b*) With courage "to war a good warfare." 2. This hope was a sanctifying virtue. 3. This hope amounts to an assurance [*The Homiletic Quarterly*].

THE DOUBLE RECOMPENSE TO GOD'S PEOPLE.—*Verses* 13—15.

The abundance of the blessings promised after release is expressed by the word *double*, which conveys the idea of compensation, a measure of glory outweighing all former sufferings. "For your shame ye shall have double."

I. Victory over the world will be granted. "The sons of Javan are the Greeks, as the world-power, the Græco-Macedonian monarchy (cf. Dan. viii. 28), against which the Lord will make his people into a hero's sword" [*Keil*]. This was fulfilled in some measure in the wars of the Maccabees and Seleucidæ, but must not be confined to that period. The Gospel is destined to overthrow the wisdom of the Greeks, and subdue the world to Christ. 1. *Victory by human agency.* Ephraim and Judah have to fight. Apostles and ministers have to preach. "Heaven made us agents, free to good or ill" [*Dryden*]. 2. *Victory by God's blessing upon human agency.* "I have been raised up," &c. These words found an echo in Judas Maccabæus, when the company with him asked, "How shall we be able, being so few, to fight against so great a multitude and so strong, seeing that we are ready to faint with fasting?" "It is no hard matter," answered Judas, "for many to be shut up in the hands of a few; and with the God of heaven it is all one, to deliver with a great multitude, or a small company" (1 Macc. iii. 16—19: cf. 2 Chron. xiv. 8—11). **II. The special presence of God will be displayed.** "The Lord shall *be seen* over them," conspicuously displaying his power for them. 1. *As a shield to defend them.* "The Lord of Hosts shall defend them," in the midst of enemies numerous, powerful, and bitter. He delivered "by providential arrangements, by earthquakes, by angelic messengers, by direct punitive and deadly judgments. He released them, to the amazement and confusion of their enemies, from the closest and most vigilant confinement" [*Wardlaw*]. 2. *As a conqueror to help them.* Taking the sling-stones as a figure of the enemy [*Keil*], they were trampled beneath the feet of the Jews. "The souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling" (1 Sam. xxv. 29). A phrase denoting security from the assaults of the enemy under the special protection of God. 3. *As a shepherd to provide for them.* "The Lord their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people" (ver. 16). Not only victory, but lasting peace. Constant care and tenderness will be exercised over his people (Ps. xxiii.). **III. Great honours will be conferred upon them.** Job's latter end was better than the beginning. The dignity of God's people shall be double their shame. 1. *Moral beauty.* "How great his beauty!" The beauty Christ bestows upon his people in character and conduct is more than human; it is Christ's own beauty. "Thou art fairer than the children of men."

"Old friends shall lovelier be,
As more of heaven in each we see" [*Christian Year*].

2. *Unwonted prosperity.* *Young men* shall be made cheerful, and no longer suffer scarcity. *Maidens*, ready to faint from hunger and thirst, shall have plenty of new wine. This abundance of the fruits of earth typifies the recompense to God's people. They will be strengthened, and made glad; be led to admire God's free love and favours, and to commend all past dealings as excellent and good. "For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!"

"Beauty armed with virtue bows the soul,
With a commanding, but a sweet, control" [*Percival*].

THE MIGHTY STRUGGLE AND THE GLORIOUS VICTORY.—*Verses* 13—17.

I. **The army is collected.** "The Lord God shall blow the trumpet." The terms are martial. The *trumpet* blowing naturally represents the proclamation of the Gospel by Divine authority, and with accompanying Divine power; the design being thus the gathering of outcast sinners to Christ's standard; and thus the enlargement of his spiritual host, and the increased rapidity of his conquests [*Wardlaw*]. 1. *The foes.* "Against thy sons, O Greece." 2. *The friends.* Judah the bow, and Ephraim the arrow. 3. *The commander.* Jehovah "seen over them," like the pillar of cloud and fire. II. **The conflict is described.** The description is poetical. 1. *Terrible as a storm.* "His *arrow* shall go forth as the *lightning*"—suddenly and irresistibly (cf. Ps. xviii. 14). "The whirlwind of the south" sweeps everything before it. No power in earth or in hell can resist the might of Divine grace. Thousands will yet be subdued. 2. *Furious as wild beasts.* "They shall devour," a metaphor from beasts. Like devouring lions, they would eat the flesh and drink the blood of the enemy. "Behold a people like the lioness; it rises up, and like the lion does it lift itself up: it lies not down till it devour the prey, and drink the blood of the slain" (Num. xxiii. 24). III. **The victory is gained.** The result is not uncertain. "Conquering and to conquer." 1. *Victory given as a shepherd to his flock.* "God shall save them in that day as the flock of his sheep." 2. *Victory recorded in the crown of the conqueror.* Precious stones or gems were set in crowns, and the elevation of the crown indicated victory. "A victory is twice itself, when the achiever brings home full numbers" [*Shaks.*]. 3. *Victory celebrated in the joy of the conqueror.* The general idea is that of sacred joy, the songs and shouts of victory, inward delight and exultation of spirit. "They shall drink, and make a noise as through wine."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 11, 12. Duty, and encouragements to perform it; or, the stronghold—how to get it, and the blessings of its security; or, salvation may be had. This salvation only gained by effort. "Turn ye," &c.

Ver. 12. 1. Available refuge. "The stronghold," impregnable, secure, and lasting. 2. Access to it free, and should be immediate.

Ver. 14. *Arrows.* Strongly express the *speed* and the resistless *power* of his converting grace. The arrow of Divine truth, with which the Apostolic bow was fitted, carried conviction to the conscience, and quickening power to the heart. By killing it made alive. We are reminded of the language of Ps. xlv. 3—5 [*Wardlaw*].

Ver. 16. *God's people glorified.* Here we see the *dignity* of the Lord's people. They are "stones," precious stones, set in the "crown" of the King of kings. Here is also their *exhibition:* these stones of a crown are "lifted up." They are not to be concealed. Here is also their *utility:* these stones are to be lifted up "as an ensign upon the land"—an

oriflamme suspended over the royal tent; designed to attract followers to the cause in which he is engaged [*Jay*].

Ver. 17. *How great his goodness!* God's free love (benevolence) the fountain of all mercies. 1. Great in the gift of Christ. 2. Great in the conversion of sinners. 3. Great in the support of his people. How great were *the sacrifices* which Christ's goodness made! How great are *the gifts* which his goodness bestows! How great *the extent* to which his goodness spreads! How great is *the duration* of his goodness! [*Sacred Garland*]. But it is not the *goodness* of God alone that is to be seen in the Gospel. "How great is his *beauty!*" The loveliness of his entire character—its *light*, as well as its *love*—the united harmony of all its attributes in the work of Christ! We are not truly under the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit, if it is only his *goodness* that we admire. The faith of the Gospel imparts a spiritual taste for "the beauty of holiness," as well as of love. It teaches and disposes us to delight in *all that God is* [*Wardlaw*]. Hence, great his beauty — 1. *In himself.* "The brightness of the Father's glory," &c. "The glory of the only begotten," &c. He is beautiful in his Divine and human nature. 2. *In his people.* "The king's daughter all glorious."

> "All human beauties, all Divine,
> In my Beloved meet and shine."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IX.

Vers. 1—6. The foreground of this prophecy is the course of the victories of Alexander, which circled round the Holy Land without hurting it, and ended in the overthrow of the Persian Empire. The surrender of Damascus followed first, immediately on his great victory at the Issus; then Sidon yielded itself and received its ruler from the conqueror. Tyre he utterly destroyed; Gaza, we know, perished; he passed harmless by Jerusalem. Samaria, on his return from Egypt, he chastised. History gives no other explanation of Zechariah's prophecy than this conquest by Alexander: that conquest agrees minutely with the prophecy. No other event in history does [cf. *Pusey's* Lectures on Daniel].

Ver. 7. The happy effect of this humiliation of the great worldly powers of Persia, Syria, and Philistia, was this—that they lost their confidence in their own false deities, and were prepared to receive a purer faith. The prophet foretells this, and predicts also, that there will be a faithful remnant among those nations, which will turn to the true God; and many among the heathens will become *governors* in Judah; many who were once Gentiles will become preachers and missionaries in Christ's Church. Even Ekron itself will become a *Jebusite*, a dweller in Jerusalem, the Church of God [*Wordsworth*].

Ver. 8. *Encamp.* On every side the watch is kept by warriors of sleepless eyes, and the Captain of the Host is one whose prowess none can resist. We little know how many providential deliverances we owe to those unseen hands which are charged to bear us up, lest we dash our foot against a stone [*Spurgeon*].

Vers. 9, 10. *Thy king.* Christ as a *mere* man was great—great in intellect, heart, purpose, action; as a Mediator, supremely great. But how does this great Being, Prince of the powers of the earth, enter Jerusalem? In a triumphal chariot?—on a stately, prancing steed, accompanied by a magnificent cavalcade? No! On an ass. The more truly kingly a man is, the less he cares for conventional pageantry. Your great men have never cared for jewellery. The more ornaments are coveted, and dress is studied, the more mean and impoverished the soul. Heart of oak requires neither veneer nor varnish. A great age has never been an age of millinery and gold rings. The kingly soul does not care for the rose or the crown [*Dr. Thomas*].

Vers. 11, 12. *Pit.* Some of the pits referred to in the Bible were prisons, one such I saw at Athens, and another

at Rome. To these there were no openings, except a hole at the top, which served for the window and door. The bottoms of these pits were necessarily in a filthy and revolting state, and sometimes deep in mud. "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay:" one of these filthy prisons being in the Psalmist's view; in Isa. xxxviii. 17 called "the pit of corruption," or putrefaction and filth [*John Gadsby*].

Vers. 13—15. *Mighty man.* It is held that valour is the cheapest virtue, and most dignifies the haver [*Shaks.*]. When a man goes in the fulness of his strength upon any enterprise, how do his blood and spirits triumph beforehand! No motion of hand or foot is without a sensible delight. The strength of a man's spirit is unspeakably more than that of the outward man; its faculties and powers more refined and raised; and hence are rational or intellectual exercises and operations much more delightful than corporal ones can be [*Howe*].

Ver. 16. *Flock.* What condescension, for the Infinite Lord to assume the office and character of a Shepherd towards his people! It should be the subject of grateful admiration that the great God allows himself to be compared to anything which sets forth his great love and care for his people. No man has a right to consider himself the Lord's sheep, unless his nature has been renewed, for the Scriptural description of unconverted men does not picture them as sheep, but as wolves or goats. A sheep is an object of property, not a wild animal; its owner sets great store by it, and frequently it is bought with a great price [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 17. Goodness and beauty.

"Oh, he is good,—he is immensely good,
Who all things formed, and formed them all for man:
Who marked the climates, varied every zone,
Dispensing all his blessings for the best,
In order and in beauty!" [*Smart*].

CHAPTER X.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Idol worshippers** brought their judgments now; they must call upon Jehovah. **Ask**] He will give *rain*: *i. e.* all temporal and spiritual blessings. **Clouds**] Lightnings, precursors of rain. **Showers**] Lit. rain of heavy rain: *i. e.* plentiful (Job xxxvii. 6). **Grass**] for cattle, and *corn* for man. **2. Idols**] Lit. the teraphim, household and oracular gods, thought to give prosperity (cf. Gen. xxxi. 19). **Diviners**] Soothsayers brought misery through vain and deceitful prophecy. **Therefore**] Because they trusted idols and soothsayers. **They went**] Lit. to break up, pull up the pegs, and take down the tent; hence wander into exile. **Troubled**] Oppressed, because no **shepherd**] no king, to defend them. **3. Punished**] Lit. visited the **goats**] in evil, but his **flock**] for good, and made them courageous as a war-horse; a horse chosen by the commander-in-chief to ride at the head of his army. **4. Out**] Thrice repeated, for emphasis. Judah no more subject to foreigners; from them were to come rulers described as **corner**]-stones, upon which the building firmly rests (Ps. cviii. 22). **Nail**] The large ornamental pin, fixed in the wall, to suspend valuable furniture (Judg. iv. 21: Isa. xxii. 23). **The battle-bow**] Military force, and weapons in general. **5.**] For such heroic conflict will they be fitted by the help of Jehovah, that the enemy will be put to shame before them. The riders of the horses are mentioned for the purpose of individualizing the enemy, because the principal strength of the Asiatic rulers consisted in cavalry (cf. Dan. ii. 40) [*Keil*]. **6. Judah**] will share as well as Ephraim. **Bring**] and replace them happily and securely, as of old. **7. Ephraim**] addressed in remainder of chapter, had not participated much in restoration. They, like Judah, would become heroes. **Rejoice**] *i. e.* fight like a mighty man exulting in joy (cf. Ps. lxxviii. 65, 66). **Children**] should see the joy, which would be lasting and complete. **8. Hiss**] Whistle as bee-keepers call back swarms to the hive. The extraordinary increase of Jews after this is a familiar fact of history (cf. Josephus' *Wars*, Bk. iii. ch. iii. § 2). **9. Sow**] broadcast, with a design to multiply (Hos. ii. 25: Jer. xxxi. 27). **Remember**] Return to right mind (cf. Luke xv. 17: Ps. xxii. 27). **Live**] in political and spiritual life. **10. Egypt**] the house of bondage, and **Assyria**] the scene of captivity, represent all lands in which they are now scattered. **Gilead and**

Lebanon] Their old dwellings east and west of Jordan. This territory, though fertile and large, should not be able to support them. **11. The sea]** personified, shall not hinder their return. God will march at their head, trample down all its proud waves, and the depths shall become dry. **Assyria's pride]** and Egypt's **sceptre]** (rod of task-master), shall be smitten. **12. I]** God will strengthen Ephraim. They will **walk]** in his name, and enjoy his protection; find the past a pledge of the future, and see the Divine perfections more illustrious than ever.

HOMILETICS.

God the Author of Spiritual Blessings.—*Verses* 1, 2.

At the close of the preceding chapter God had promised abundance of temporal and spiritual good. Here directions are given to obtain that good. Idolatry had brought judgments, but Jehovah will pour out blessings upon them.

I. All spiritual blessings come from God. Rain is the symbol of God's spiritual gifts. 1. *The idols of the heathen cannot bestow them.* The gods in the temple and the deities in the house are vanity and lies. 2. *The laws of nature cannot bestow them.* There are "diviners" in the present day who "have told false dreams"—who have forgotten that God sits in the heavens, and rules the clouds; that he visits the earth to water and fructify it. There is neither showers nor sunshine in the natural world without him—no personal prosperity, progress, and fruit, in the Divine life without the influence of his Spirit. Nor can any portion of the soil of the world—"the desolate heritages" of heathenism, with all the tillage that missionary labour can bestow upon them, be rendered productive of the "fruits of righteousness," except as God is pleased to shed down the same gracious influence—"pouring water on the thirsty, and floods on the dry ground" [*Wardlaw*]. "Is there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers?" "*Thou* visitest the earth," &c. (Ps. lxv. 9—11).

II. Prayer is the appointed means for securing these spiritual blessings. "Ask ye of the Lord." Men of science exalt the laws of nature, and despise prayer. Natural philosophers may combine and direct the forces of nature, but God does not. "Without a disturbance of natural law quite as serious as the stoppage of an eclipse, or the rolling the St. Lawrence up the Falls of Niagara, no act of humiliation, individual or national, could call one shower from heaven" [*Tyndall*]. But the prophet directs the people to God, when the heavens withhold their dew, and assures them that if they ask they shall obtain. "The Lord *shall* make bright clouds," &c. 1. *Blessings in rich abundance.* "And give them *showers* of rain." Enough for man and beast, "to every one grass in the field"—to every one that asks will he give, "as the showers upon the grass." 2. *Blessings in due season.* The early rain in spring, to water the seed sown; "the latter rain" in autumn, to ripen the corn. We must pray in due seasons, and look for spiritual prosperity with the same intense anxiety as the Jews did for rain twice a year. "I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, and I will send grass in thy field for thy cattle" (Deut. xi. 13—15). 3. *Blessings indicated by visible signs.* Rain, with its harbingers or accompaniments, will be given. "The Lord shall make *bright clouds.*" Clouds, as precursors of the showers, to encourage; or clouds which terrify, shall be turned into rain to bless them. "He maketh lightnings into rain" (cf. Ps. cxxxv. 7: Jer. li. 16). Clouds shall be filled with showers, and distilled as the dew upon the land. "As one shower is unburdened another shall be brewed" [*Trapp*]. Forerunners and proofs of Divine goodness shall abound on every hand. "He made a decree for the rain (regulating its time, place, and quantity), and a way (through the clouds) for the lightning of the thunder" (Job xxviii. 26).

> "Who sets the bright procession on its way,
> And marshals all the order of the year" [*Lange*].

THE MISERY OF FORSAKING GOD AND CONSULTING FALSE ORACLES.—*Verse* 2.

The Jews are here warned not to imitate the conduct of their forefathers in consulting idols, and forsaking Jehovah, who hindered Divine blessings, and brought human miseries. The warning is needed now. If man rejects the true, he will choose the false. His moral convictions, dependent condition, and exposure to danger, make him dissatisfied, and impel him to trust in superior power. Learn the folly of trusting to idols.

I. This course will disappoint. Men who renounce trust in God, and embrace false ways in hope of prosperity, will be disappointed. 1. *Idols reveal nothing to be relied upon.* "The idols have spoken vanity." The idols which men consult in distress, promise what they never perform. All the vanities of the heathen put together cannot give rain (Jer. xiv. 22). 2. *Diviners lead astray.* They put their own lies into their lips, and clothed them with God's authority. They pretended to see what they saw not. "The diviners have seen a lie." They uttered false prophecies, "told false dreams." False in matter, because opposed to God's word, false in event, because they were not fulfilled. "Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you," &c. (Jer. xxix. 8, 9). **II. This course will lead to bitterness of mind.** "They comfort in vain." If the voice of God, uttered with every degree of evidence and affection, be disregarded, and men have recourse to necromancy, the result will be vanity and vexation of spirit. All who, like Saul, seek an answer from diviners, will find them deceptive. "Ye are forgers of lies (stitchers up of falsehood), ye are all physicians of no value" (of nothingness, idol physicians, Zech. xi. 17), Job xiii. 4. **III. This course will expose to great danger.** "They went their way." They were not only disappointed and vexed, but they lost God's protection, and were left a prey to every injury. As sheep without a shepherd, they were troubled, scattered, and led into captivity. They had no king to rule over them, no priest to intercede for them, and no shepherd to care for them. This is the condition of all who forsake God, and refuse the salvation and tender care of the Good Shepherd. "My flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth; and none did search or seek after them."

DIVINE VISITATIONS.—*Verse* 3.

Against the shepherds, the leaders or chiefs of the nation, God's anger was kindled. He "punished (lit. visited) the goats," but Judah was "his flock," whom he visited in mercy. Hence—

I. The rulers are punished. As *shepherds* they should have been concerned for the flock. But they neglected, starved, and scattered the sheep. As *goats* they were guilty of mischief, the emblem of wantonness and offensive lust. God will ever make a distinction between the goats and the sheep, and those who are first in crime will be first in punishment. **II. The people are blessed.** Judah is the flock of God, and must be tenderly watched and fed. God would employ, govern, and defend them against their enemies, as a rider doth "his goodly horse in the battle." Learn the advantages of serving God, and the necessity of turning from idols. He will visit the ungodly in anger, but his people in love. The goats will be rejected, and the sheep saved (Matt. xxv. 32). "I will judge between cattle and cattle, between rams and he-goats."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. 1. *The blessing needed.* "Rain," all natural, temporal, and spiritual influences, to ripen the fruits of the earth, advance the nation in morality, and bless the Church with fertility. 2. *The way to get it.* "Ask ye of the Lord rain." Idols cannot send it, and man cannot create it

Hence, it is fitting to feel *dependence*, and give it expression in prayer. This is good for ourselves, and the only efficient method to secure Divine operations in our favour. Elias, a notable example (Jas. v. 17, 18). 3. *The time in which we should seek it.* We should ask in seasons when it is required for the refreshment and beautifying of the earth. Prayer may be out of season as well as in season. "*Ask of the Lord rain.* We should ask it in a higher sense — ask the outpouring of God's Spirit—for the revival and growth of religion and its appropriate fruits in our own souls; for its revival in our Churches, and for its progressive influence and productiveness throughout the world" [*Wardlaw*].

Ver. 2. *Idol confidences.* 1. Vanity; 2. False; 3. Comfortless; and 4. Misleading. "*Diviners have seen a lie.* Unbelief has recourse to a crowd of superstitious devices, and by their folly and impotence is put to shame. Faith, on the contrary, turns to prayer, and through it works wonders" [*Lange*].

Ver. 3. *Against the shepherds.* The sins of the civil and ecclesiastical rulers affecting the nation (cf. Prov. xxviii. 2). "Thus, saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds: and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock." *Goodly horse.* Judah's might was not in himself; but in God's hands, he had might like, and above, the might of this world [*Pusey*]. This may in part be understood of the Maccabees' victories; but principally of the Apostles, those white horses, upon which they rode through the world, conquering and to conquer (Rev. vi. 2) [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

The Deliverance and Establishment of God's People.—*Verses* 3—7.

God confirms his mercies to Judah and Israel, enlarges the former predictions, and assures the triumph, restitution, and defence of his people.

I. God will deliver them from their enemies. Foreign or native oppressors—the sinful leaders of the flock, or the inveterate foe of the nation, would be visited with punishment. Often at the worst, things turn for the better. Whatever troubles, his people—they are his flock—will not be cast off; but delivered, "For the Lord of Hosts hath visited his flock." **II. God will equip them for self-defence.** Though exposed to danger, yet God will furnish them with everything necessary to defend themselves, and prevail over their enemies. Governors of their own shall be raised up to unite and help them. No foreign aid will be required. The corner-stone, the nail, and the battle-bow, all strength would be inherent, though given by God. "Their nobles shall be from themselves, and their governor shall go forth from the midst of them." **III. God will give them victory over their enemies.** The timid sheep became strong as the battle-horse. From a peaceful people sprung heroes, mighty men, to deliver from oppressors. The victory of the Maccabees typifies the triumph of Christ over anti-Christian powers. 1. *This victory will be complete.* "Their enemies" will be trampled down as mire in the streets, foul and worthless. As Jehovah's war-horse they will overcome and confound the cavalry of the foe. "The riders on horses shall be confounded." 2. *This victory will be through Divine aid.* "They shall fight because the Lord is with them." Courage is not our own. All might comes from God, and against his power nothing can prevail. Mere human strength is perfect weakness, but God strengthens in Christ (Phil. iv. 13). Feeble humanity rises into prowess and majesty when made mighty in all (kinds of) might (Col. i. 11). **IV. God will restore them to ancient privileges.** Most commentators take vers. 6 and 7 as alluding to the ten tribes. Judah and Israel are distinctly mentioned. A more complete restoration than a few from Babylon. A greater deliverance than the Maccabean is promised. 1. *The tribes of Israel will be united together.* The

house of Joseph will share the salvation, and all Judah together will be strengthened. The children of God, scattered abroad, shall be incorporated; Jew and Gentile shall become one fold. 2. *The land will be restored to them.* "I will bring them again to place them." Privileges lost through sin will be restored when God turns to his people. 3. *Security will be given them.* God will place them; make them dwell securely as in olden time. They shall be treated as if they had never been cast off. "I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings" (Ezek. xxxvi. 11: cf. Job xlii. 12). **V. God will cause others to participate in their privileges.** Ephraim and their sons would not be forgotten, though hitherto not partaking largely of the blessings of restoration. 1. *In the strength of conflict.* "They of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man." 2. *In the joy of victory.* "And their heart shall rejoice." God's presence will be their strength and song. From generation to generation, mercy will be enjoyed in renewed performance of the promise. "Yea, their children shall see it, and be glad."

God the Author of Political Blessings.—*Verse* 4.

God is the King of kings, and Lord of lords. He only can give magistrates and legislators who are "for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well." They are not created by the institutions nor the politics of the state. "The powers that be are ordained of God."

I. Men who are the corner-stones, the ground of support to the state. Princes are often called "the chief (*corners*, marg.) of the people" (1 Sam. xiv. 38: cf. Isa. xix. 13; xxviii. 16). **II. Men who are the nails, the strength of the state.** They unite discordant parties, as nails fasten different timbers. On them rest the responsibilities of government, and the security of the whole fabric. Rulers and officers in the Church should strengthen and hold it together. On them hang all the implements of evangelical warfare, which should be ready for use. "I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house" (Isa. xxii. 23, 24). **III. Men who are the battle-bow, the defence of the state.** Armour in general, for personal and national conflict—men to wield it with skill and success come *from him.* **IV. Men who govern, the rulers of the state.** "And from him every oppressor together," *i. e.* in a good sense, every ruler who exacts tribute from nations subject to Judah. Thus the state is built up and defended by God. Legislation without him is insecure. He must be trusted for every politician that founds and fastens the empire together—thanked for every ruler that crushes oppression. All valour and success, all ornaments and defence, are from him. "The Lord is Governor among the nations."

The Religion of Joy.—*Verse* 7.

Through communicated and accompanying might of Jehovah, Ephraim would be a man of *valour and strength* against every foe. The exulting *joy* with which they would be filled would impart energy of heart and hand. In proportion to the amount, the variety, and long-continuance of their outcast condition, of depression and humiliation, of scorn and reproach, of personal and social oppression; and of all, as the effect and indication of what was worse than them all—Divine desertion—the hidings of God's countenance, his frown, his wrath—should be the joy of Jehovah's return and blessing [*Wardlaw*].

I. Joyful religion in its source. Its source is secret and hidden from the world. 1. *It is in God.* They shall "rejoice in the Lord"—not in his gifts, health, abundance, and honour—but in God himself. In his favour and friendship, in his Word and service. 2. *It springs from the heart.* "Their heart shall

rejoice." Not from outward circumstances, but from pardoned sin and peace with God. This fountain of living waters is within a man. "A good man shall be satisfied from himself." **II. Joyful religion in its degree.** "Their heart shall rejoice as through wine." Wine is called by Plato, "the mitigator of human sorrows." The figure denotes exuberant joy, joy beyond a natural degree (cf. Ps. lxxviii. 65; civ. 15). By a bold figure wine is said to "cheer God" himself (Judg. ix. 13. Hence as cordials are seasonable in the hour of need; so joy buries sorrow, and makes us forget past evils. "Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." **III. Joyful religion in its influence.** This fountain is never sealed. 1. *It conduces to health.* Diseases of the mind produce diseases of the body; a fretful repining spirit will waste away the vigour and beauty of the constitution. "Let thy mind's sweetness," says Geo. Herbert, "have its operation upon thy body, clothes, and habitation." "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance; but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken." 2. *It promotes activity.* Happy Christians are strong and active Christians. Ancient nations drank wine before battle. Those who drink of this joy will be heroes in life. "Neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." 3. *It influences others.* Children see and neighbours feel it. "I am sure my father's religion is true," said one, "because it makes him happy." "The beams of joy," says Fuller, "are made better by reflection." Yet some are strangers to this joy. Their religion is morbid and melancholy—"the religion of the sorrowful," misrepresenting the bright religion of Jesus. Seek to rejoice in God, and to rejoice always. "Delight thyself in the Lord."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 5. *Mighty men* or warriors of the Gospel. 1. *Their valour.* The figure is general, indicating triumphant progress against all enemies, and thorough and shameful discomfiture. It was in looking forward to the success of his Apostles—so rapid, so signal—that our Lord said, "I beheld Satan fall, as lightning from heaven." The comparison is simple. "*As* mighty men." They shall triumph over the enemies of their cause as completely as the most victorious general over his enemies. The causes and the weapons are widely different; so is the spirit in which the war is conducted, and the results to those taken captive by the conquerors [*Wardlaw*]. 2. *The source of their valour.* "They shall fight because the Lord is with them." He is the source of all success. Through him they do valiantly; for he it is that treads down their enemies. Not a victory, not a trophy, not a song, without him (Jos. xxiii. 10: Neh. iv. 20). If Mithridates never wanted courage nor counsel, how much more shall the Messiah and his mighty men succeed in their warfare! "The Lord God, he it is that fighteth for you."

Ver. 6. *I have mercy upon them.* Here is a double cause alleged, of these great and gracious promises; and both excluding works. *First*, God's mere mercy; *secondly*, his election of grace "for I am the Lord, their God." This latter is the cause of the former; for God chose his people for love, and then loveth them for his choice. The effects of which love are here set down —1. That he heareth their prayers, "I will hear them." 2. That he re-accepteth and restoreth them in Christ, as if they had never offended against him. "They shall be as though I had not cast them off." That was a cutting speech, and far worse than their captivity, when God not only threatened to cast them out of their country into a strange land, but that there, "he would show them no favour" (Jer. xvi. 13). Here he promiseth to pity them, and then they must think deliverance was at next door [*Trapp*].

1. *The blessings.* Strength, "I will strengthen them;" salvation, "I will save;" and restoration. "I will bring

them again." 2. *The cause of the blessing.* God's *mercy.* "I have mercy upon them." God's unchanging purpose; "they shall be as though I had not cast them off." 3. *The consequence of the blessings.* "I will hear them." He heard the voice of their distress, as he did in Egypt. But understand their calling upon Jehovah in a state of penitential abasement, confession, and return of heart (cf. *Wardlaw*). "*I will hear,*" is the fulfilment of a promise repeatedly made to them in former days, and an encouragement in their present dispersed state. "Jehovah *yet* 'waits to be gracious.' His ear is open to their very first penitential cry; and while his ear will be open (*that* alone were little) his *power* will be ready to aid" [*Wardlaw*].

True conversion. 1. Men turn to God only through Divine mercy. 2. When men repent, and turn to God, they are treated as if they had not been cast off. 3. Humble penitent prayer to God is an evidence of converted men. "Prayer is to religion what thinking is to philosophy. To pray is to make religion" [*Novalis*].

HOMILETICS.

THE RESTORATION, SETTLEMENT, AND INCREASE OF GOD'S PEOPLE.—*Verses* 8—12.

To remove all doubt concerning the promises just given the restoration is more minutely described.

I. The restoration of God's people. "I will gather them." 1. *From different places.* From "the land of *Egypt,*" a type of all lands of bondage. "Out of *Assyria,*" a type of all lands of exile. They shall be sought and found in all quarters of the world. 2. *By Divine call.* "I will hiss for them and gather them." As bee-keepers whistle back the bees to the hive, or as sheep flock together at the well-known call of the shepherd, so God will bring them back to himself and their inheritance. "He will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth; and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly" (Isa. v. 26). 3. *Without hindrance.* (*a*) *Distance* shall not keep them back. Out of lands far and near. (*b*) *Distress* shall not hinder them. At the Red Sea Israel thought they were lost. The sea of affliction shall be opened up. Its smitten waves shall overwhelm the foe, "for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians" (Ex. xiv. 24, 25); or sink into silence at the command of its Maker and Ruler. "All the deeps of the river shall dry up." (*c*) *Enemies* shall not impede them. "The pride of Assyria shall be brought down." The rod of Egypt shall be broken. The wonders of old shall be repeated, and the first deliverance shall be eclipsed by the last. **II. The settlement of God's people.** "I will bring them into the land of Gilead" beyond Jordan, the eastern, "and Lebanon," the northern, boundary. 1. *Settled them in Divine strength.* "I will strengthen them in the Lord." Strengthen them to resist temptation, discharge duty, and endure trial. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." 2. *Settled them in delightful freedom.* "I have redeemed them" (ver. 8): spiritually and temporally, the type of the true Israel. "I gave Egypt for their ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." **III. The increase of God's people.** "And they shall increase as they have increased." 1. *Increase by sowing them in other nations.* As seed sown in the ground they were scattered, not merely to spread the knowledge of God, but to be quickened in themselves, and to quicken others. "The word is used of sowing to multiply," says Pusey, "never of mere scattering. A rich harvest was to spring from them." "I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast." 2. *Increase with unparalleled degree.* "Place shall not be found for them." "A promise of such increase is a promise that includes much more than it

expresses. It implies in it all that contributes to such rapid multiplication." "The children of thy bereaved estate shall yet say in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place, that I may dwell." 3. *Increase in permanent duration.* "They shall live with their children and turn again." The gift would be a continual gift. "They and their children, and their children's children for ever" (Ezek. xxxvii. 14). The blessing would not be transient, but abiding; the chartered privileges would be as before the dispersion. "The promise is unto you and to your children."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 9. Here we seem to have their *dispersions*, their *penitent recognition of God*, and their *consequent preservation* and *return* [*Wardlaw*]. *Sow them*, partly to keep them as winter seed in the ground till the spring-time of their conversion and restitution; and partly making them seed to bring in an increase of the fulness of the Gentiles at their conversion. Further, the Lord promiseth that scattering should not hinder their conversion, for the veil shall be taken away, and they shall remember the Lord, and they and their children being preserved shall return to God [*Hutcheson*].

They shall remember me—1. May be applied to the Jews; and 2. to the conversion of sinners. It indicates—1. That men have *forgotten God*, wandered into distance from him. 2. That true conversion is a "turning again" to God in humility and duty. A state of unregeneration is one of forgetfulness. Sinners have lost all sense of God's glory, authority, and mercy. The first religious exercise of the mind is reflection, fitly represented in the prodigal when he *came to himself*. Then a return to God the Father. "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord."

Ver. 12. *Security and happiness under Divine protection.* 1. *Christian knowledge;* a knowledge of God's name revealed to direct and encourage in duty. "The *name of Jehovah* is a comprehensive expression denoting his glory as manifested in history" (*Hengs.*). 2. *Christian profession.* To walk in his name, or maintain a course of life in harmony with God's will and word. 3. *Christian freedom.* "They shall walk up and down." "The expression seems further to imply a state of felt peace, and freedom, and confidence of safety, and happy social intercommunion, arising from faith in God—from unshaken reliance on his power and wisdom, faithfulness and love" [*Wardlaw*]. *I will strengthen them in the Lord.* The very assurance we want in the duties and trials of life. Confidently rely upon it, for it comes from the lips of Faithfulness and Truth. But we may err as to manner of fulfilment; our expectation therefore to be regulated accordingly. Observe, that the fulfilment of the promise *will not exempt us from all ground of complaint.* It will keep us in work, but not cause us to cease—secures help in conflict, but war lasts for ever. *It will also be seasonable.* "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." Look for grace, not for imaginary but real purposes, not for future but present difficulties, to "help in time of need." These supplies of strength *to be sought in God's own way.* In the use of appointed means. Foolish to avoid religious exercises, even when not in a proper, spiritual, and lively frame. *Then* the means most necessary, as fire when we are cold, and excitement when dull [*Jay*].

Vers. 10—12. Messianic mercies. Survey the whole promise from ch. ix. 11 onwards; there are two leading thoughts developed in it. (*a*) That those members of the covenant nation who were still scattered among the heathen should be redeemed out of their misery, and gathered together in the kingdom of Messiah. (*b*) That the Lord would endow all his people with

power for the conquest of the heathen. They were both fulfilled in weak commencements only in the times immediately following, and down to the coming of Christ, by the return of many Jews out of captivity and into the land of their fathers, particularly when Galilee was strongly peopled by Israelites; and also by the protection and care which God bestowed upon the people in the contests between the powers of the world for supremacy in Palestine. The principal fulfilment is of a spiritual kind, and was effected through the gathering of Jews into the kingdom of Christ, which commenced in the times of the apostles, and will continue till the remnant of Israel is converted to Christ its Saviour [*Keil*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER X.

Vers. 1, 2. *Ask rain.* Men seem practically to have but little remembrance that the mainspring of all mechanism of second causes is in the hands of an invisible Creator; that it is not from what goes on in the hidden laboratories of what they call nature that season succeeds season, and shower and sunshine alternate with so much of beautiful and beneficent order, but that the whole arrangement is momentarily dependent upon the will and energy of that Supreme Being who "sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers" [*Melville*].

Ver. 3. *Shepherds.* As hired servants will tend men's sheep no longer than it is profitable to them, so is it with promotion-seeking ministers [*Cawdry*].

Ver. 4. The administration of *government*, like a guardianship, ought to be directed to the good of those who confer, and not of those who receive, the trust [*Cicero*].

Vers. 5, 6. *Mighty men.* Power is according to quality and not quantity. How much more are men than nations! [*Emerson*]. Where power is absent we may find the robe of genius, but we miss the throne [*Landor*].

Vers. 7, 8. "The house of *Judah*, and the house of *Joseph*," spoken of in the first of these verses, signify respectively, the *two* tribes and the *ten* tribes—unitedly, the whole house of Israel—the posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The declaration, "*I will save them, and bring them again and place them*," cannot refer to the return from Babylon; seeing, in that respect, they had been already "saved," and "brought again," and "placed." And the language is much too strong to have reference to any such remaining partial deliverances and returnings—*additions* only to that from Babylon—which might take place under the Maccabean princes, or at any period of their history between the prophet's days and the coming of Christ. And if it refers to a period *subsequent* to the coming of Christ, to what else *can* the reference be but to their recovery from their present long-continued outcast and scattered condition? [*Wardlaw*].

Vers. 9—12. The victory described is followed by a large increase of population, not confined to Judah, but also including Israel. Nor is there reason to doubt that the independence achieved by the Maccabees attracted very many of the exiles from the northern kingdom, who forgot the old causes of dissension, and united earnestly in maintaining the re-established national centre in Jerusalem. This fusion at home led to a similar fusion abroad, and wherever Jews were found, who preserved their hereditary faith at all, they still remembered Jehovah as one who had chosen Zion, and considered themselves as constituent parts of one covenant people. So far the predictions of the chapter were fulfilled historically in the period extending from the establishment of Jewish independence to the time of the advent. In the last three verses the prophet describes a far greater, because spiritual, blessing in terms borrowed from the old experience of the people. The drying up of the sea, the humiliation

of Assyria, the overthrow of Egypt, simply set forth the removal of all possible obstacles in the way of a spiritual return to God. The Lord will reclaim and bless them by procedures as marvellous as any that ever occurred in their former history [*Lange*].

CHAPTER XI.

Critical Notes.] In this chapter we have a contrast to the former. It was necessary to promise blessings, to encourage, and to warn, lest many should presume by vain confidence in the promises. We have the destruction of the second temple and of the Jewish polity for the rejection of Christ. **Lebanon**] *i. e. the temple*, lofty and magnificent as the mountain. "The picture is a dramatic one. Instead of the devastation of Lebanon being announced, it is summoned to open its gates that the fire may be able to enter in and devour its cedars. The cypresses, which hold the second place among the celebrated woods of Lebanon, are then called upon to howl over the fall of the cedars, not so much from sympathy as because the same fate awaits them" [*Keil*]. **2. Forest**] Lit. the fortified or inaccessible forest, Jerusalem, with houses numerous, and built close together, and round which was a wall (cf. Mic. iii. 12). **3. Shepherds**] In reference to office, and **young lions**] in disposition. **Jordan**] with its thickets and decorated banks, which furnished lairs for lions. Jewish leaders are represented as despairing at the destruction of their polity. **4.**] The cause of the ruin. **Feed**] The prophet to act the part of a good shepherd. **Flock**] Jewish nation. **5. Possessors**] Lit *buyers*, who think they can sell or slay for their own advantage. **6. I**] Divine pity would not be shown to them; they would be left to civil discord and foreign rule. **King**] Roman emperor (John xix. 15). **7. I**] The prophet executed the task committed to him by shepherding a sad (*poor*) flock. **Two staves**] "to set forth the kind of double salvation bestowed upon the nation through the care of the Good Shepherd" [*Keil*]. **Beauty**] Loveliness or favour (Ps. xxvii. 4; xc. 17); which Jehovah will give them in protecting them from foes. **Bands**] Internal union and friendship. Easterns tied a cord or *band* as a symbol of confederacy (cf. Ps. cxix. 61, marg.). **8.**] First act of shepherd. **Cut off**] Lit. cause to disappear, destroy, or annihilate (Ex. xxiii. 23). **Three**] orders—civil authorities, priests, and prophets (cf. Jer. ii. 8, 18); others, three rulers of Asmonean line—who died by violent death in a short space of time—Hircanus, Alexander, and Antigonus. **Loathed**] Was straitened for them: "the Divine grief at the misery of his people" [*Pusey*]. **Abhorred**] "Nauseated me." **9. Let it**] Perish those who are doomed to perish. All kindly control is withdrawn, and the flock is left to the consequences of its fatal rejection of deliverance. The fulfilment in the history of Jerusalem. **10. Break**] Symbolic action of taking away the good received by the flock in form of covenant. "That is to say, the covenant which God has made with all nations is to be repealed or destroyed" [*Keil*]. **11. Broken**] The covenant annulled as the staff was broken. This not observed by the flock at large, only by **the poor**] who recognized the fulfilment of a Divine word (Jer. xxxii. 8). **12. Good**] "He served them, not for wages, but in obedience to the Divine will." Wages, however, were due; the price of a slave offered. **13.**] It was contemptuously rejected. Jehovah regards the wages offered to himself. **Goodly**] Noble price, ironical. **Potter**] As worthless. **14.**] Worse evil threatened than the former. *Second*, utter breaking up of the nation, and loss of fraternal unity. **15.**] Since the Good Shepherd was rejected a very different class would shepherd them. **Take**] again. **Instruments**] A crook, bag, pipe, and knife, &c. **Foolish**] Bad shepherd (Ps. xiv. 1). **16.**] Conduct of this ruler described; not mere neglect, but destroys (cf. Ezek. xxxiv. 3, 4). Enumeration of particulars complete. **Claws**] Tearing off hoofs, disabling them from seeking pasture, expressive of ferocious greed. Even extremities rent rather than lose a shred of flesh. **17. Woe**] These merciless rulers meet with retribution. **Leaveth**] Instead of guarding the flock. **Arm**] Instrument of tyranny. **Right eye**] The organ of vigilance (John x. 12, 13). The former *withered*, and the latter *blinded*. "The doom imprecated is truly awful—an utter deprivation of power and intelligence" [*Henderson*].

HOMILETICS.

National Fuel for Divine Fire.—*Verses* 1—3.

Applied to the temple, the city, or the people, these words indicate the destruction of everything great in the Jewish nation. Formerly they had been visited and

recovered; now there is a final judgment. All is ripe for destruction. God's anger is kindled; the conflagration sweeps through the land, devours mountain, forests, and lowland pastures, and creates lamentation in man and beast.

I. The nation's glory is spoiled. "Their glory is spoiled." The temple and the city, the boast and excellency of the nation, were besieged and sacked. Their honour and power were brought low; the wealth and luxury acquired by the abuse of power became a prey to the enemy. God can take away the results of our labour, and the monuments of our skill. We may think our resources to be secure, and our fortifications impregnable, but the doors will open to the Divinely-appointed agency. **II. The nation's nobility are cut down.** "The mighty are spoiled." The leaders of the people—men of superior and inferior ranks—are taken away. "The *cedars*," the pre-eminent in rank and office; the *fir-trees*, rulers of lower grade; the "*oaks* of Bashan," men of strength and sturdy power—the highest and the lowest are involved in fearful destruction, and howl in agony together. Whatever be the estimation in which nobility are held, Divine wrath may consume them like fire. "Worship your heroes from afar; contact withers them" [*Madame Necker*]. **III. The nation is filled with despair.** "Howl, fir-tree." If doors open of their own accord, what use are defences? If the highest fall, what can the lowest do? When chief men, in civil or religious position, are fallen from their station, horror and anguish may well fill the community. 1. Despair *most sad.* "Howl." The cedar, the fir-tree, the oak, alike suffer, "for the forest of vintage is come down." 2. Despair *universal.* All have cause for alarm and lamentation. The fire sweeps through Lebanon and Bashan, the entire land is seized, mountain and plain, forests and fields, are laid waste; men and beasts cry out in terror, and universal despair indicates the awful ruin. If God's favoured nation were thus punished, let the wicked beware and the godly be warned. "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed (rewarded or chastened) in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner (shall not go unpunished)" (Prov. xi. 31).

CHRISTIAN SORROW FOR FALLEN GREATNESS.—*Verse* 2.

The Bible abounds with comparison, is an ancient book, and in proportion as you go back in history, you will find the language poetic. The warm imagination of the Easterns never suffered them to speak without figures. Men are called trees. Three things in the text—

I. The differences there are among men. Where are sameness and equality to be found? God is always producing variety. All flesh is not the same flesh (1 Cor. xv. 39). What wonder, then, that differences should exist among men? Some are superior to others in family, rank, and station; in *corporeal* qualities, in stature, in beauty, in strength, gracefulness, and speed; in *mental* qualities, in acquired knowledge, in *usefulness*. Think of the Luthers, the Whitfields, and the Hills. Some cedars and others fir-trees. **II. Their fall, however, distinguished.** 1. There is *a moral fall* to which we are exposed while in flesh and blood; indeed a man is never secure as long as he is in the world. 2. There is *a mortal fall* by death, accident, disease, infirmity, or age. Great men die often—not always—before others. Here the cedar falls, while the fir-tree survives. **III. The sorrow caused by their removal.** 1. *Sympathetic sorrow.* Sympathy, a word the more we consider the less we can explain. We only know the fact that God has put something within us which reciprocates the feeling which we find in another. A mother hears her child cry, and darts to its relief. You see a man drowning in water; you sink as he sinks, rise as he rises, and are equally glad when he comes to shore. 2. *Rational sorrow.* All men die. Princes and soldiers that defend us, merchants that supply us, and husbandmen that till our ground and fill our barns Can we see the nation stript of these, like a tree dropping its leaves in

autumn, and not feel? Can we see the country robbed of its members, its ornaments, and not sorrow? 3. *Pious sorrow.* We are told of St. Ambrose that when he heard of the death of a minister of Christ he burst into tears. (*a*) The death of a good man is a public loss. We lose their examples, which are important and beneficial. (*b*) As *benefactors*, they are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. (*c*) As *intercessors*, they pray for others as well as themselves. (*d*) As the *defence* of the earth, they are better than navies and armies. Ten righteous men would have saved Sodom. 4. *Unlawful sorrow.* We sorrow, not as those without hope. (*a*) Your mourning would not be proper if accompanied with *murmuring;* (*b*) if *ungrateful;* (*c*) if it called you away from present things. Every day has its duties [*The Preacher's Treasury*].

THE FLOCK OF SLAUGHTER.—*Verses* 4—6.

The prophet here performs in vision the acts enjoined, and becomes a representative of the Messiah, who feeds those willing to be fed, and punishes those who reject him. But by obstinate wickedness, instead of becoming "the sheep of his pasture," they become "the flock of slaughter," doomed to destruction.

I. The shepherds of the flock were worthless. Not merely negligent, but very wicked. 1. *They had no compassion.* "Their own shepherds pity them not." Sad when ministers have no benevolent feeling for their flocks—when rulers in every department under their control are devoid of conscience. 2. *They were avaricious.* They bought and sold, to make gain of the flock. They sought only to gratify *self* and covetous desires. "All other love is extinguished by self love; beneficence, humanity, justice, philosophy sink under it" [*Epicurus*]. 3. *They were cruel.* "Whose possessors slay them." In ruthless cruelty "they ate the fat, and clothed themselves with the wool, and killed them that were fed." "Yea, they are greedy dogs, which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter." 4. *They are hypocritical.* They say, "Blessed be the Lord." They are cruel and oppressive, yet profess to be religious! They succeed in ways which God abhors and reprobates, and then thank God for their riches! Sin is most daring when committed and defended under the pretence of piety, and claiming the approval of God in success. Sanctimonious hypocrisy is often displayed in covetousness and self-aggrandizement. "Hypocrites do the devil's drudgery in Christ's livery," says one. **II. The flock itself is given up to destruction.** 1. *Divine pity was withdrawn.* God had often displayed compassionate forbearance towards them, but now he "will no more pity the inhabitants of the land." 2. *Evil discord rent them asunder.* The zealots and factious Jews expelled and slew one another in the siege of Jerusalem. "I will deliver the men, every one into his neighbour's hand." 3. *The land was smitten by the foe.* "They shall smite the land." The people generally and individually were delivered into the hands of the Roman emperor. With indignant voice they rejected their own lawful ruler, and cried, "*We have no king but Cæsar!*" They were dispossessed of their trust, and their precious inheritance was given to others. Those who should have been protectors became oppressors. Without friends or helpers, they were destroyed as a nation, "and live only to perpetuate the memory of their past history, and teach more vividly its great lessons of sin and retribution." "Out of their hand I will not deliver them."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 4. 1. *The wretched flock.* Forsaken and flayed by the shepherds, counted all day for the slaughter. 2. *The tender compassion of Jehovah.* "Feed them," foster and preserve them with affectionate care. "O the goodness

of God to a nation so shamelessly, so lawlessly wicked. He himself, the Shepherd of Israel, neglected no good office in seeking and feeding them; was careful to raise up shepherds for them (Mic. v. 5), till at length he sent the Man, Christ Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, who came to look up the lost sheep of the house of Israel, whom (to move compassion and affection) he here calleth the sheep of slaughter, until the time prefixed for their total dispersion, by reason of ingratitude" [*Trapp*].

Ver. 5. 1. *Wickedness declared to be innocent.* "They slay them, and hold themselves *not guilty*." They thought there was no wrong in it, and would not be called to account for it. "All that found them have devoured them: and their adversaries said, We offend not, because they have sinned against the Lord" (Jer. l. 6, 7). 2. *Wickedness claiming God as its associate.* "Blessed be the Lord." Can anything be more offensive to God than to thank him for the gains of oppression and fraud! "To what point does not art reach? Some learn even to weep with grace" [*Ovid*]. 3. *Wickedness justified by success.* "I am rich." I have succeeded in business, prospered in family and estate, therefore I must be right. God has blessed me, I may thank him! "Success consecrates the foulest crimes" [*Seneca*]. Thus while "through covetousness they with feigned words made merchandise of men," they at the same time sought to impose upon the omniscient God, and to put *him* off with words and forms, in which there was *no heart* and no moral or spiritual obedience. There could not be a juster description of the leading features in the character of the Pharisees. These were *avarice* and *hypocrisy:* their hypocrisy being, as is the wont of religious dissemblers, accompanied with a large amount of ostentation and parade. Mark the manner in which our Lord speaks of them (Matt. xxiii. 14, 23—25).

Ver. 6. *No more pity.* 1. *God's pity is very great.* Had been displayed in wonderful ways to his people, and is to us. 2. *But this pity is limited.* "No more." Forbearance will reach its limit, and heavy woes will fall upon those who despise it. Observe the evils threatened —(*a*) Deadly feuds; (*b*) Foreign yoke; (*c*) Dispossession of land; and (*d*) Helpless misery. "They shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them."

"Mercy to him that shows it is the rule" [*Cowper*].

HOMILETICS.

The Two Staves; or Beauty and Bands.—*Verse* 7.

The *two staves* are differently explained, indicating, according to some, the *double care* of Christ for his flock. *Henderson* takes them as symbols of "the two modes of treatment" which the Jews had experienced "under the guidance and protection of God." *Beauty* has been rendered *grace* or *favour*. Taken in its connection (ver. 10), it means the covenant of God, with all its blessings and special favours. *Bands* signify unity or brotherhood, which binds men together (ver. 14).

I. The staff Beauty. "The one I called Beauty." This symbolizes—1. *God's gifts to men.* The gifts of pastors, the wisdom of senators, and the power of princes come from God. 2. *God's presence with men.* Purity of worship and principle in the nation—holiness in character and usefulness in the Church—are beauties which attract and adorn. The image of God, the beauties of holiness, are most desirable. "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." 3. *God's defence of men.* God's covenant was a pledge of defence to them as long as they kept it. Thus God's favour is better than armies and fleets, wealth and valour, in the protection of a people. This alone beautifies and strengthens. "For God is my defence, and the God of my mercy." II. The staff Bands. "The other I called Bands." Binders symbolize the unity or brotherhood among men. 1. *This*

alone is the gift of God. In the gospel we have a basis of brotherhood, and motives to cement it. The bands of friendship and marriage, the contracts of business, and the treaties of nations may be broken. But in Christ we have a living, universal, and everlasting brotherhood of humanity. 2. *How strong are men when thus bound together.* Foes without cannot destroy unity within. "Union gives strength and firmness to the humblest aids." 3. *How weak are men when not thus bound together.* Factions and civil discords in the nation, divisions in the Church, and discords in the family, will bring ruin. Nothing can beautify or defend a broken people. "Men's hearts," says Carlyle, "ought not to be set against one another, but set with one another, and all against the evil thing only." If you wish to retain strength and beauty, co-operate together, in obedience to the Great Shepherd, and under the rule of Beauty and Bands. "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand."

THE SHEPHERD PROPHET.—*Verses* 7, 8.

I. The charge. The command was given, "Feed the sheep" (ver. 4). Eagerly does the prophet undertake the duty, and become a type of Christ. "Lo, I come to do thy will, O my God." But notice the condition of the flock. 1. *A helpless flock.* In the hands of cruel shepherds; bought and sold by strangers, oppressed by native rulers. 2. *A miserable flock.* "Poor of the flock," lit. truly miserable sheep. Men may be poor without being miserable. But the Jewish people were reduced to a most unhappy condition. As in the days of Christ, they were harassed and worried (Matt. ix. 36); lost sheep (x. 36). The poor are not despised, the lost are sought out, and the wounded are healed by the gospel. "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." **II. The method of executing the charge.** "And I fed the flock" (ver. 7). He performed, like Christ, the work of a good shepherd to the Jewish nation. 1. *He furnished himself with staves.* "I took unto me two staves." He did all he could to bind them together in unity and obedience, and direct them to the grace and favour of God. 2. *He destroyed the oppressors of the flock.* "I cut off three shepherds." "These," says a critic, "were the persons of influence by whom the affairs of the nation were conducted, and to whose wickedness, which reached its culminating point when they crucified the Lord of glory, the destruction of the state is to be ascribed." 3. *He was grieved in soul at the condition of the flock.* "My soul loathed them." He witnessed the fearful wickedness of rulers and teachers. He was deeply pained, "vexed from day to day with their unlawful deeds." This was the feeling of Christ, and will be the feeling of all true shepherds. Sad the wickedness which creates tears of the Saviour! If "every human feeling is greater and larger than the exciting cause," as Coleridge says, what must be the *loathing* of him who sees the hearts of all men! "He knew what was in man."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 7. *I fed the flock.* Christ the King of men. The poor in spirit are chosen to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom. "Jehovah in Christ did the work of a Good Shepherd to the Jewish nation during the whole of his earthly ministry (cf. John x. 11—14; xiv. 6: Heb. xiii. 20: 1 Pet. ii. 25)" [*Wordsworth*].

Ver. 8. My soul loathed them. 1. *Divine compassion.* "Loathed," lit. was *straitened*, the opposite of *enlarged* towards them, in love and tender compassion (2 Cor. vi. 11, 12). "His soul

was *grieved* (shortened) for the misery of Israel" (Judges x. 16). 2. *Human abhorrence.* "Their soul also abhorred me." "My soul did not loathe them first, but their soul first despised me, therefore my soul abhorred them." The soul which drives away God's good Spirit comes at last to loathe him and the thought and mention of him [*Pusey*]. No room was left by them for the grace of God, and his favours were rejected [*Calvin*]. Learn that unbelief creates a mutual distaste between God and the sinner. "Their soul *nauseated* me" is the real meaning—that alienation from God will lead to God's withdrawal from men. "I will not feed them" (ver. 9).

3. *The impenitent flock and the grieved Shepherd.* God is infinitely happy and incapable of grief, yet acts as if he felt the sins and miseries of men. "The Good Shepherd lost patience with their perverse impenitence, and they, on the other hand, loathed him for his spirituality and holiness" [*Lange*]. Christ cannot be rejected with impunity. Even the Jews, who "did it ignorantly in unbelief," paid a terrible penalty for their crime; how much more terrible will be the punishment of those who have all their unbelief without any of their ignorance [*Id.*].

HOMILETICS.

God withdrawn, and Man given up to his own Destruction.—*Verses* 9—11.

The treatment which the Shepherd received leads him to give up feeding the flock, and leave it to its fate. Israel rejected Jehovah, and was in turn rejected. The staves were broken, and the miserable flock have experienced the weight of the words, "Woe unto them when I depart from them!" Learn—

I. That God may withdraw himself from men on account of their sins. "Then said I, I will not feed you." God woos and awes men; instructs and chastises them; loads them with benefits and corrects them in evil; uses all possible means to keep them in his ways: but they despise his long-suffering, and provoke his wrath. The greatest favours of God often draw forth the worst manifestation of conduct. Men persist in rebellion, refuse when God calls, and are ultimately left to their folly. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man."

II. That when God withdraws himself from men fearful punishment falls upon them for their sins. How awful the picture given here. 1. *Destruction most effectual.* "It was broken in that day." If not suddenly, the Jewish nation suffered eventually. God has power to execute judgments, and nothing escapes his notice. 2. *Destruction in manifold ways.* (1) By *pestilence.* "That that dieth, let it die." (2) By *the sword.* "And that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off." (3) By *famine.* "Let the rest eat every one the flesh of another." (4) By *intestine feuds.* God withdrew, and ceased to be "a wall of fire round about them." The staff Beauty, the covenant, was broken, and fearful was the fulfilment. When the Romans forced admission into their city, famine and pestilence, feuds and mutual hatred, had done their work. Josephus tells us that every law of nature and humanity was broken; that even the very letter was fulfilled: "The left over shall eat every one of the flesh of his neighbour."

The Observant Few.—*Verse* 11.

When the staff was broken, and calamities were threatened, this was not observed by all. Only a small number gave heed to Jehovah, and recognized the fulfilment of the Divine word. Their character, attitude, and experience are described.

I. Their character is described. "The poor of the flock." Poor in condition and poor in spirit. The nation was gone astray, but God had "a seed to serve

him." The people were doomed, but Jesus had a "little flock." However low the condition of the world, God has always a "remnant according to the election of grace." **II. Their attitude is described.** They "waited upon me." They *prayed* to God for mercy; *observed* God in the warnings and actions of the prophet. They discerned the hand of God in the signs of the times, just as the disciples saw coming judgments in the siege of Jerusalem, and fled to Pella. "Whoso readeth, let him understand (mark, consider, 2 Tim. ii. 7) it" (Matt. xxiv. 15). **III. Their experience is described.** They knew that it was "the word of the Lord." They *understood* the word of God, however perplexing it was to others; were *sensible* of God's displeasure, and cherished a humble spirit. Events which are common occurrences, chances of war to some, are warnings of God to others. Let faithful pastors be encouraged from these words. Prophets before them have shared their lot—ministered to a flock, despised by the world, but distinguished by the mark that they know the Lord. Jesus himself thought it not beneath him to shepherd "a little flock," whom he will own at the great day.

The Shepherd's Price.—*Verses* 12—14.

The prophet, representing Jehovah, demands the price for his services. The Jews were God's peculiar people, blessed above all others, and should have made grateful return. But they offered forms for sincerity, added injury to insult, and sold the Messiah for thirty pieces of silver.

I. A price of their own rating. "If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear." As their servant, he sought their love and obedience. He will not force, but leave it to free-will. If men withhold what is due, God will not constrain them to give. His goodness should bind us to love him. "Love sought is good, but given unsought is better" [*Shakespeare*]. **II. A price most contemptible.** "They weighed, for my price, thirty pieces of silver." They gave him the price of a bond-servant, half the value of a free-man—the compensation for a slave that had been killed (Ex. xxi. 32: Matt. xxvi. 15). "A goodly price"—a splendid value that has been set upon me! Good men are not half valued in the world. What wonder when Christ, the Son of God, was sold so cheaply! **III. A price rejected by the Shepherd.** "Cast it unto the potter." The most suitable person to whom to cast the despicable sum, who plies his trade in the valley of polluted clay (2 Kings xxiii. 10). An action significant of the mind of God, and the doom of the people. God values our smallest service if offered in sincerity, but contempt of his Son will meet with death. **IV. A price which brought Jehovah's displeasure upon them.** "Then I cut asunder mine other Staff" (ver. 14). The shameful payment by the people leads to the abandonment to their fate. Fraternal unity is dissolved, and the nation is broken up into self-destroying parties. When schisms rend the Church, and factions break the peace of a people, we may see the withdrawal of the Shepherd's care, and the presage of the nation's doom. "When the staff of Beauty is broken the staff of Bands will not hold long. An unchurched people will soon be an undone people."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 12. *If ye think good.* The demand an appeal to *men*, to give them opportunity of reasoning, explaining their conduct, and appreciating God's kindness. 1. God lays men under great obligation by his love; makes them indebted to him. 2. Men should make some return to God. Not because they enrich God, but as proof of their affection. 3. God seeks return. "Give me my price." He will not enforce it, but leave the consequences with men.

"Thus saith the Lord God, He that heareth let him hear, and he that forbeareth let him forbear."

Ver. 13 (cf. Matt. xxvii. 3—10). There are points of diversity between the two transactions—that in the Prophet, and that in the Evangelist. There are points, too, of similarity; and in these the allusive type is to be considered as lying. The "*price*"—reward or hire—given to the prophet, in the vision, represented the slight value set upon his person and official services. So did the same price, put upon the head of a greater than Zechariah or any of the prophets, testify the low value they set upon *him* and his Divinely-attested ministrations and work. The *identity* of "the price;" the principle, or want of principle, shown in its pitiful diminutiveness; and the giving of each to "the potter," are the chief points of resemblance, in which the treatment of the prophet was a prophetic prefiguration of the treatment of him "of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write." However indirect and obscure the prefiguration might be, we are not to regard the reference by Matthew as a mere *accommodation*. There was in what befell the prophet a designed foreshadowing of what in the future should befall the prophet's Lord [*Wardlaw*].

House. They are his most guilty adversaries who, like the Jews in Jesus' days on earth, and like apostate Christians in our days, are so "in the house of the Lord" [*Fausset*].

Ver. 14. *Cut.* God seems to say that he will now no more govern this people in mildness and clemency, nor yet exercise his shepherdly severity in saving corrections and visitations, as formerly he had done; but utterly reject and disject them [*Trapp*].

HOMILETICS.

The Charge of Worthless Shepherds.—*Verses* 15—17.

Israel rejected the Good Shepherd, and must now be ruled by shepherds of a different class. In one more symbolic act the prophet represents the truth. "Take unto thee *yet* the instruments of a foolish shepherd." Notice—

I. The character of the shepherds. These pretended shepherds are described —1. *They were worthless.* "Woe to the *idol* shepherd." An idol expresses vanity, a thing of nought. "A *shepherd of nothingness*, one who hath no quality of a shepherd." Destitute of spiritual life, no care for themselves or their flock, mere forms or images before God. 2. *They are foolish.* Foolish is synonymous with *wicked* (Ps. xiv. 1). Not mere ignorant and unqualified, but unprincipled and ungodly shepherds; vain, passionate, and cruel. **II. The rule of the shepherds.** This is described in the figure, not the exact words of Jeremiah (xxiii. 1, 2) and Ezekiel (xxxiv. 3, 4). 1. *They are negligent.* "Who shall not visit." The flock is sick, wounded, or lost; and the shepherd is unfaithful and negligent. 2. *They are selfish.* They think only of gratification and self-indulgence. "He shall eat the flesh of the fat." 3. *They are cruel.* They not only neglect, but seriously injure the sheep. They have neither sympathy for the young nor regard for the lost. They seize and devour the flock, and tear in pieces the claws of the sheep.

> *Attend.* "This holy fox
> Or wolf, or both,—for he is equal ravenous
> As he is subtle, and as prone to mischief
> As able to perform 't" [*Shakespeare*].

III. The punishment of the shepherds. "Woe to the idol shepherd" (ver. 17). 1. *Judicial blindness.* "His *right eye*," which should have been vigilant, ever looking out to guide the flock, "shall be *utterly darkened*." Visited with blindness, "he shall grope in the noon-day as in the night." 2. *Withered strength.* "The

sword shall be upon his arm," by which he should have defended the flock. His boasted light shall be obscured, and his might dried, shrivelled up to nothing. He is bereft alike of wisdom and strength. Awful warning to faithless ministers. "If such woe," says Wardlaw, "hung over negligent, unfaithful, unfeeling, selfish shepherds, under the old economy, how weightily ought *they* to feel their responsibility, to whom, under the new, Christ says, "Feed my sheep: feed my lambs"!

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 15. *Instruments of a foolish shepherd.* Exalted rank and sacred power; the weakness of human nature, and all the means to support their ambitious designs.

Ver. 16. 1. The condition of the flock. Some are *cut off.* Having wandered, they are left to perish. Others are "*broken, i. e.* injured through the fracture of a limb. The opposite of that which stands upon its feet, and is still strong" [*Keil*]. Some *stand still* through faintness or weakness. "Better *the whole* (as the word always means, 'in its good estate;' like our prayer, 'that thou wouldest strengthen those who do stand'). Which was set firm, or set himself firm, as in Ps. xxxix. 6, 'Every man in his firm estate is all vanity.' Id quod stat (S. Jer.)" [*Pusey*]. All require special care. But notice — 2 The wickedness of the shepherd. He should sustain and furnish every one with provisions. "If taken as pointing to an individual king, there is none to whom it will more aptly apply than to Herod who was totally regardless of the real interests of the Jews, and whose reign was marked by the perpetration of the most shameful and barbarous cruelties" [*Hends.*].

The whole chapter sets forth—1. The conduct of the Good Shepherd (vers. 4—14) who laid down his life for the sheep. 2. The conduct of the bad shepherds (vers. 15—17). The foolish, cruel, and worthless rulers, who devoured the flock and destroyed the nation.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XI.

Vers. 1—3. *Open.* Josephus relates, that "at the passover, the eastern gate of the inner temple, being of brass, and very firm, and with difficulty shut at eventide by twenty men; moreover with bars strengthened with iron, and having very deep bolts, which went down into the threshold, itself of one stone; was seen at six o'clock at night to open of its own accord. The guards of the temple running told it to the officer, and he going up with difficulty closed it. This the uninstructed thought a very favourable sign, that God opened to them the gate of all goods. But those taught in the Divine words, understood that the safety of the temple was removed of itself, and that the gate opened."

Ver. 2. *Fir-tree.* The world cannot do without great men, but great men are very troublesome to the world [*Goethe*]. The highest and most lofty trees have the most reason to dread the thunder [*Rollin*].

Ver. 5. *Rich.* It is success that colours all in life; success makes fools admired, makes villains honest [*Thomson*]. Let them call it mischief: when it is past and prospered, it will be virtue [*Ben Jonson*].

Ver. 6. *Deliver.* Such was the fury of contending factions, that all parts of the city and the very temple itself were filled with slaughter. In their mutual frenzy, they burned the very granaries of corn which should have sustained them, and destroyed the magazines of arms which should have defended them. And such was the pressure of the famine, that parents and children, husbands and wives, tore the food from each other's mouths, scanty and bad as it was, and, as a subsequent verse hints, fed on the very bodies of

the dead, envying them the meanwhile the cessation of their sufferings [*Wardlaw*].

Vers. 7 (10 and 14). The prophetic narrative which follows differs in its form, in some respects, from the symbolic actions of the prophets, and from Zechariah's own visions. The symbolic actions of the prophets are actions of their own: *this* involves acts which it would be impossible to represent, except as a sort of drama. Such are the central points, the feeding of the flock, which yet are intelligent men who understand God's doings: the cutting off of the three shepherds; the asking for the price; the unworthy price offered; the casting it aside. It differs from Zechariah's own visions, in that *they* are for the most part exhibited to the eye, and Zechariah's own part is simply to inquire their meaning and learn it, and receive further information. Here he himself is the actor, yet representing Another, who alone could cut off shepherds, abandon the people to mutual destruction, annulling the covenant which he had made [*Pusey*].

Ver. 9. *I will not.* God's decrees are not the result of deliberation, or the Almighty's debating matters within himself, reasoning in his own mind about the expediency of things, as creatures do; nor are they merely ideas of things future, but settled determinations founded on his sovereign will and pleasure [*Buck*].

Ver. 10. *Beauty.*

> "In his favour life is found,
> All bliss beside—a shadow or a sound"
> [*Cowper*].

Vers. 12, 13. *Price.* The influence of money on a man will be according to the man's state of mind; according to the condition of his heart and affections, his estimate and plan of life [*Binney*].

Ver. 14. *Brotherhood.* Let us keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Let this soft and silken knot of love tie our hearts together: though our heads and apprehensions cannot meet, as indeed they never will, but always stand at some distance off from one another [*Cadworth*].

Vers. 15—17. *Shepherd.* O miserable is that Church wherein are hirelings instead of the Good Shepherd; more miserable where are wolves in place of hirelings, and most miserable where devils in place of wolves [*Bishop Jewell*]. *Eat the flesh.* Not keeping but clipping the flock; as if having now got a cure, they might bid adieu to care [*Bernard*].

CHAPTER XII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter begins the first half of the second prophecy concerning Israel's future and the nations of the world. The conflict against Jerusalem and Judah will issue in the destruction of the enemies (vers. 1—4). **Burden**] Implying distress to Israel and destruction to their foes; explained by reference to God's creative power, which removes all doubt concerning the thing predicted. **2. Cup**] Causing those who drink *to reel;* a symbol of Divine judgments, which intoxicate and cause nations to fall and perish (Isa. li. 17: Jer. xxv. 15). **Against**] Lit. "also with Judah it shall be thus in the siege of Jerusalem," *i. e.* Judah with Jerusalem will be a cup of wrath; the country and capital will be involved in the same conflict. **3. Burden.**] Another figure, borrowed from the custom of young men lifting up stones to test their strength. Nations will fail and suffer. **Cut**] They will wound themselves by the sharp edges of the stones. **4. Horses**] and riders represent warlike forces, confused and injuring one another; but God exercises great care over his people. **Madness**] (cf. Judg. vii. 22: 1 Sam. xiv. 20). **Open**] *i. e.* to protect (1 Kings viii. 29: Neh. i. 6: Ps. xxxii. 8). **5. Judah**] Chiefs of Judah will see the foe smitten with madness and recognize in the repulse of the enemy by *the metropolis* Divine security for *the country*

devours faggots, or a torch consumes sheaves. **Jerusalem**] *i. e.* the inhabitants. **Again**] After complete rout of the enemy shall dwell in (Jerusalem) peace. **7. Tents**], shifting and insecure, and spread over the country, first saved; to prevent pride and self-exaltation in the inhabitants of the fortified and well-defended metropolis. **8. Defend**] God's people will be exalted to a degree of strength and glory surpassing anything in their experience. Even the *stumbler*, one who can scarce hold himself up, much less attack a foe, *the feeble*, shall be heroes like David; David's house shall exceed its ancient fame, become like *God;* yea, like **the angel** that guarded Israel in the wilderness; the highest type of glory and strength (Ex. xxiii. 20; xxxii. 34). This climax proves the beautiful style of the prophet, and contains stimulating consolation as a promise. **9. Seek**] expresses the energetic purpose of the speaker, *more humano* [cf. *Lange*]. **10.**] This a complete contrast to preceding; nothing warlike, but all subdued and spiritual, "a clear and definite prophecy of the future conversion of the Jews, in consequence of a special and extraordinary outpouring of the influences of the Holy Spirit" [*Henderson*]. **Jerusalem**] The whole covenant nation. **Spirit**] which brings *grace*, and which results in *supplication*. **Look**] Applied to bodily and mental vision (cf. Num. xxi. 9: Isa. xxxii. 11), with the idea of confidence in thing looked at. **Me**] Jehovah (ver. 1). **Mourn**] The consequence of looking. **Him**] Jehovah—Messiah speaking in *his own person* first, then the prophet speaking of *him* [*Fausset*]. **Pierced**] Thrust through, to slay by any kind of death (cf. Lam. iv. 9). Mourning most bitter and deep, as for an **only son**]. **11.**] An illustration given, the greatest recorded, mourning for Josiah in **Hadadrimmon**], a city in the valley of *Megiddon* (2 Chron. xxxv. 22). **12.**] It is universal mourning. "All the families and households of the nation mourn, and not the men only, but also the women. To this end the prophet mentions four distinct leading and secondary families, and then adds in conclusion, 'all the rest of the families, **with their wives**'" [*Keil*].

HOMILETICS.

The Omnipotent Supremacy of God.—*Verse* 1.

To remove doubt concerning the promises in this chapter, God prefixes his name, proves his omnipotence, and declares his supremacy over matter and mind.

I. God is supreme in the physical world. Power is displayed in its creation and constant government. 1. *He formed the earth.* He "layeth the foundation of the earth," fixed it on its basis, and revolves it on its axis. He not only made, but rules and judges in it, and those mistake who say, "The Lord hath forsaken the earth." 2. *He stretched out the heavens.* Like "a curtain" he can stretch them out or draw them together. God not only created at first, but continually sustains all things. But the power which created the world must be unlimited and ever present to uphold it. Without him the earth would wander from its orbit, and the universe fall into ruin. "*Upholding* all things by the word of his power" (Heb. i. 3). **II. God is supreme in the spirit world.** He "formeth the spirit of man within him." God is the Creator and sustainer of man's spirit. "The *Father* of spirits." The human soul is the breath of the Almighty (Job xxxiii. 4); and spiritually we are of Divine parentage (Acts xvii. 28). "Behold, all souls are mine." He created them all, endowed them with powers and faculties necessary to constitute them subjects of moral government (cf. *Hend.*, Ezek. xviii. 4). He controls men's hearts and purposes "as rivers of water," encourages his people and dispirits their enemies, and will save his chosen by quickening grace and eternal life. Thus in creation and human experience we have proofs of God's power, refutations of doubt to perform his promise, and hope in seasons of trial and difficult enterprise. "I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; . . . that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers" (Isa. xliv. 24, 26).

God's People ruinous to their Enemies.—*Verses* 2—4.

Here we have promise of security to the Church of God. Nations may attack Jerusalem, but will fail, whatever be their forces and fervour. Three figures are used to indicate this failure. They will be intoxicated by the "cup of trembling,"

wounded by the "burdensome stone," and consumed by the "hearth of fire" (ver. 6).

I. The enemies of God's people will be rendered powerless in their efforts. They will gather together and besiege Jerusalem—thirst for spoil and blood, and be doomed to destruction. As the gods infatuated those whom they destroyed, so God will intoxicate them with the wine-cup of wrath, administer a potion to make them helpless and reel on the ground. Sennacherib's army were stupefied and helpless in their assault. Persecutors may be excited to rage, but will be deprived of their precaution and power, made drunk in their fury, and exhausted in their efforts. "The stout-hearted (valiant) are spoiled, they have slept their sleep (of death), and none of the men of might have found their hands (were able to fight)" (Ps. lxxvi. 5).

> "For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
> And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
> And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
> And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever were still" [*Byron*].

II. The enemies of God's people will be wounded in their efforts. This stone will be *burdensome* to all who seek to remove or carry it away. God's Church is founded on the rock, and persecutors dash against it in vain. It is a rock of offence by virtue of its charter and power, a stone of stumbling to many. In times of persecution kings and rulers have tried to upset or remove this stone, but it has torn, lacerated, or ground to powder those upon whom it has fallen. Israel escaped, but Pharaoh was drowned in the sea. The Philistines captured the ark, but Dagon was broken to pieces. Diocletian built a monument to commemorate the extinction of Christianity, but he perished, and it survives. In a conference with Andrew Rivet, the King of France threatened severe measures against the cause of truth, but the Reformer answered, "May it please your Majesty, the Church of God is an anvil which hath broken a great many hammers" [cf. *Lange*].

III. The enemies of God's people will destroy themselves by their efforts. Zechariah revives the words concentrated by Moses to express the stupefaction at their ills which God would accumulate upon the people if they perseveringly rebelled against him. Each expresses the intensity of the visitation [cf. *Pusey*]. 1. *They are smitten with blindness.* Then they rush to their own ruin (Zech. xiv. 12, 13). 2. *They are smitten with terror.* The horses of the enemy were unmanageable by their riders, got entangled one with another, and became injurious only to themselves. 3. *They are smitten with madness.* "I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness." The riders were deprived of self-possession and forethought. Thus all attempts will fail, and bring shame and discomfort upon those who are guilty of them. "I will sing unto the Lord; for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he cast into the sea."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. Learn—1. That the promises of God often seem incredible. 2. That doubt concerning these promises will hinder our comforts. 3. That the visible effects of God's power should remove our doubt and strengthen our hope. Nothing can fail for lack of power and love. The Church, therefore, is perfectly safe, the enemies are in great danger. *Pledges of Divine faithfulness.*—The *power of God*, by which he stretched forth the heavens. The *wisdom of God*, by which he founded the earth. The *goodness of God*, by which he formed the spirit of man [cf. *Trapp*].

Ver. 2. *A cup of trembling.* What it is, and who brings it, and who drinks it. "The cup is all bitter and full of sorrow," saith Augustine: "the godly do often taste the top, and feel the

bitterness, but then it is suddenly snatched from them; but the ungodly shall drink the very grounds and extremest poison" [*J. Adams*].

Ver. 3. *A stone.* It is not a rock, or anything in its own nature immovable, but *a stone*—a thing rolled up and down, moved, lifted, displaced, piled on others, in every way at the service and command of men, to do with it what they willed [*Pusey*]. But notice its tremendous weight and injurious effects when abused!

Ver. 4. The self-destruction of the enemy, and the perfect security of the Church; or the madness of men, and the special providence of God. *I will open mine eyes*, in contrast to the *blindness* with which God smote those arrayed against them—in pity, love, and guidance, in contrast to the cruelty and self-injury of the foes [cf. *Pusey*]. God seems to *close* his eyes sometimes, and leave his people in darkness and distress. The enemy thinks that God disregards them; but eventually he will notice the trials of the Church, and splendidly interfere to destroy her foes.

HOMILETICS.

The Energy of Zion's Leaders.—*Verses* 5—7.

God will not only preserve Israel, but raise up and qualify rulers to manage their affairs—holy men, putting confidence in the people, and rejoicing in the welfare of the country. Notice the energy of spiritual leaders.

I. Its elements are the unity and affection of the people. "The princes of Judah shall say in their heart, (lit.) 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem strength to me.' The princes recognize in the unity and love to God found in the people their strength to endure and defend. The poor and weak are held in highest estimation, and confessed to be the hope of the nation, not as a matter of expediency nor policy, but from deep conviction." In their heart the rulers confess this. God's people may be ignored by worldly rulers, but they are the defence and glory of an empire. II. Its origin is found in Divine grace. "In the Lord of Hosts, their God." Few or many, holy or unholy people have no inherent worth. Rulers have no energy without God. Jehovah makes Jerusalem "a cup and a stone." "On human principles, or according to the ordinary operation of cause and effect, the world would prevail. Often every advantage is on its side — arms, wealth, influence, state-craft, learning, prestige, and numbers. Yet the few, the weak, the unlettered, the lowly, the things that are not, brought to nought the things that are. The excellency of the power is not in man, but of God. The Lord will not give his glory to another. 'Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubians a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet *because thou didst rely upon the Lord*, He delivered thee'" [*Lange*]. This should—1. *Aid the weak.* "The Lord shall save the tents of Judah first." 2. *Humble the strong.* That "the glory of the inhabitants do not magnify themselves against Judah."

The Danger and the Defence of Zion.—*Verses* 6, 7.

The Church is looked upon by many as troublesome. They have spared no effort to destroy it. God has defended Zion, the city of our solemnities.

I. The danger of Zion. A mighty confederacy is formed against it. "All the people of the earth" (ver. 3) gathered to besiege Zion. "They shall be in the siege" (ver. 2). "To cut off the name of Israel, that it should be no more in remembrance." Gathered against a defenceless people. In Zech. ix. 13 we have the bow, the sword, and the valour of the Maccabees under the direction of God; but here we have tents shifting and insecure. II. The defence of Zion. The people and the princes make common cause become one-minded, and each exalt the

strength which the other was to him in Jehovah. 1. *God helps them to defend themselves.* Self-help first, and then help from others. "For they can conquer who believe they can," says Virgil. "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie which we ascribe to heaven" [*Shakspeare*]. 2. *God helps them by his own power.* "The Lord shall save." The defenceless *first*. The country people were more exposed, and needed greater protection. They might be forgotten or despised by the citizens of Jerusalem; but God specially protected them. This was to teach the great men—men of influence and position—"not to magnify themselves against Judah." None must assume anything to himself. All, the meanest and mightiest are equal in the sight of God, and saved by grace Divine. Hence in every civil and religious community there should be no ill-feeling in the low towards the high, and no disrespect in the rich towards the poor. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

"Praise is only praise when well addressed" [*Gay*].

SPIRITUAL HEROISM.—*Verses* 8, 9.

As a consequence of Divine protection, the weak would be strengthened, the mighty endowed with supernatural vigour, and all their enemies would be scattered. **I. Spiritual heroism is Divine in its source.** The strength is "as the Angel of the Lord before them." "The Angel of Jehovah," known as the manifestation of Deity in their history. The might of God in Christ Jesus. "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." **II. Spiritual heroism is different in its degrees.** We have two classes mentioned—1. *The feeble become powerful.* "He that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David." He that stumbles and is ready to fall shall become a hero, a mighty man of valour. His feebleness and unskilfulness shall merge into strength, and God shall teach his hands to war and his fingers to fight. "Let the weak say, I am strong." 2. *The strong shall be more powerful.* David's house shall eclipse its former splendour, and be "as God." He shall possess a superhuman courage and decision, perform exploits, and resemble God, seen marching in the front of his conquering hosts. **III. Spiritual heroism is gradual in its growth.** "From strength to strength," by strenuous effort and perseverance. Faith is gained by experience, and courage strengthened by trial. "Tried grace is growing grace." The sapling once bending before the blast has become the sturdy oak by the tossing storm. No degree of strength is impossible, but the steps to attain it are gradual. "The righteous also shall hold (take firm hold) on his way, and he that hath clean hands be stronger and stronger (add strength)" (Job xvii. 9).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 5. *Strength to me.* 1. The piety and unity of a people the strength of the leaders. 2. The confidence of the leaders in the people a necessity to success. Without concurrent aid, skill and valour of little avail. In times of danger there should be full co-operation, reliance one upon another, and hope in God. "This union and valour would be the '*strength*' of their leaders; without which they must find themselves utterly powerless. A divided, dispirited, heartless, dastardly soldiery or populace is weakness, disappointment, and discomfiture to the best-conceived plans of the most bold, prudent, and experienced leaders" [*Wardlaw*].

Ver. 6. *The pot of fire.* The governors of a united and brave people, when trusting to God, are—1. *Destructive.* "Like a hearth of fire (a fire-pot) among wood, or like a torch of fire in a sheaf." 2. *Very destructive.* "They shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left." The idea conveyed is destruction most

terrible and complete—most easily and most certainly accomplished. 3. *Very destructive only through God.* "I will make," &c. Jehovah speaks, infatuates and exposes the enemy, and makes the chiefs of Judah a consuming fire. "The fire could not kindle the wood or the sheaf of itself, unless applied to it. All is of the agency of God: *I will make*" [*Pusey*].

Notice—*First*, the destruction of the enemy; *second*, the restoration of the city. "Jerusalem shall be inhabited again." The people shall yet dwell in their own city. "It shall not be a new city in some new territory; but Jerusalem, the city of their fathers, the city of their God; on the same spot, hallowed by all the ancient associations of their history and religion. The language pointedly and strongly expresses reoccupancy and permanent possession" [*Wardlaw*]. Literally, *Jerusalem shall dwell still under herself*, i. e. the Church will not rely on earthly powers, which will be opposed to her, but she will dwell in continual stability, dependent upon herself (cf. vi. 12, *out of his place*; lit. *from under himself*), and on her own spiritual strength, derived from her Divine Head, Christ [*Wordsw.*].

Ver. 7. 1. The certainty of salvation. "The Lord also *shall* save." 2. The method of salvation. "Judah *first*." 3. The design in the salvation. "That the glory of the house of David . . . do not magnify themselves." No local or personal supremacy then. In the Christian Church all are equal; nothing is due to learning, wealth, or merit, and none should domineer over the rest.

Vers. 8, 9. Zion's conquest over her enemies — all of God, yet achieved through human agency. 1. By defending the helpless; 2. Aiding the stumbler; and 3. Elevating the mighty. The strongest have need of more strength, and this strength is only found in Jehovah. Hence the promise of defence added to that of strength.

Ver. 9. 1. God's people have many enemies. "*All the nations* that come against Jerusalem." 2. These enemies will be discovered. "I *will seek*." Secret plotters and open enemies will be found, however distant their dwelling or daring their enterprise. 3. These enemies will be destroyed. "I will seek *to destroy*." This the end of all persecutors, the issue of all opposition to God. "God will seek to destroy them, not as if at a loss for ways and means (infinite wisdom was never nonplussed), but his seeking intimates earnestness and intent upon it, and that he overrules means and instruments, all motions and second causes, to accomplish it."

HOMILETICS.

Israel's Sin and Israel's Sorrow.—*Verses* 10—14.

As the former portion of the chapter sets forth the outward protection of providence shown toward the New Testament Israel, by means of which it emerged victor from all trials and conflicts, and saw its enemies utterly discomfited, this portion turns to the other side of Israel's experience, and deals with its outward character, showing how the covenant people become such, how the Church in its new form commences the Christian life, and obtains a title to the Divine protection. It is by the bitter herbs of repentance, leading to pardon and renovation through a believing sight of the pierced Saviour—the whole preceded and induced by a copious shower of spiritual influences of the same kind as those predicted by Joel (ii. 28) and Isaiah (xliv. 3; xxxii. 15). In this view the two parts of the chapter correspond to each other, and make one complete whole [*Lange*].

I. Israel's sin. "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced." Indignities and insults offered to the Son of God. "Upon *me*." By wicked hands they crucified and slew the Messiah. "From that day to this the impenitent and

unbelieving Jews have given their hearts' *consent* to the judgment and deeds of their fathers; have reiterated the cry, 'His blood be on us and on our children:' have through many successive generations continued to 'crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh.' On this account it is here said, even of the Jews who shall repent and believe in a yet future generation, 'They shall look upon him whom *they* have pierced,'—an expression which signifies not merely that their sins, like 'the sins of the whole world,' contributed to bring sufferings upon the Saviour, but which describes the *state of mind and heart* toward Jesus; their being, though not in act, yet in spirit, his murderers, as their fathers were" [*Wardlaw*]. **II. Israel's mourning.** The sorrow described by comparisons "was a repentance unto salvation which needs not to be repented of." 1. *It was universal.* Not confined to Jerusalem, but "the land," the whole nation, "shall mourn." Four leading classes are mentioned. The *priesthood* or "family of the house of Levi;" the *royal* lineage or "family of the house of David;" the *prophets* or "family of the house of Nathan:" the *scribes* or "family of the house of Shimei." 2. *It was intense.* Like the sorrow of loving parents bereft of the only object of their affection, a sorrow most deep and bitter, the death-wail of the Egyptians (Ex. xi. 1). A mourning like the national distress at the loss of Josiah. 3. *It was personal,* each family *apart.* Our relations to God are personal, and our grief must be solitary. There is a sorrow as well as a joy with which strangers intermeddle not. The power of God came down upon the Indians when David Brainerd was preaching. "Their concern was so great, each for himself, that none seemed to take any notice of those about him. They were, to their own apprehension, as much retired as if they had been alone in the thickest desert. Every one was praying apart and yet all together" [cf. *Lange*]. "I acknowledge *my* transgressions: and *my* sin is ever before me."

"The deeper the sorrow, the less tongue hath it" [*Talmud*].

The Spirit of Supplication.—*Verse* 10.

Not in vain did Moses and others long for a copious outpouring of the Holy Ghost. God answered their appeals, and one of His promises lies before us. Addressed towards the close of the Babylonish captivity to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, it must not be limited to these alone. In contrast to the fearful judgment of God upon their enemies, they were promised the rich gifts of the Spirit "of grace and of prayer," that is, according to the most probable interpretation, the influence of the Spirit which imparts grace through which he teaches to pray in truth; and in consequence of this benefit, says the Lord, "they shall look on me whom they have pierced." The complete fulfilment of this promise must be looked for in the future. Looking at the Holy Ghost in the special character here represented, as the best instructor of the prayer which is well-pleasing to God, in the *first place,* it is through him that a sense of the *necessity* of prayer is awakened. The necessity exists for all, but experienced by comparatively few. Who must not often confess, "We can scarcely urge sluggish flesh and blood to pray"? Who then teaches men to seek and inquire after God earnestly? Who permits the sinner no rest until his broken heart is fashioned to pray? The Holy Spirit teaches man to cry after God, convinces the sinner of sin, and constantly fans the flame, and lo, it blazes bright and high! It is through him that *boldness* in supplication is heightened. We lack courage to approach, but he banishes fear, begets confidence, and enables us to go joyfully to the Father in the Son's name; places hallelujahs on the lips which recently uttered with trembling, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" It is the Holy Ghost through whom the *tendency* of prayer is so directed that it glorifies God and is abundantly blessed to ourselves. If more disposed to what is pleasant than necessary, and we allow

ourselves to be deceived by appearances, he shows us our folly, and induces us to ask the best gifts with the most pressing urgency. Do there come moments —what Christian knows them not?—in which we scarce can tell what we ought to pray for—the Spirit helps our infirmities, &c. (Rom. viii. 26); so that all the varying, conflicting desires of the restless heart are subservient to one object, that God's name should be glorified, and his will in and through us be perfectly accomplished. Even as regards frustrated wishes, the desires are not in vain. "He that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit;" and through the same Spirit again is the hearing of prayer assured to us. The amen of faith so heedlessly taken on the lips he places in the heart, and instructs God's children to trust that the answer, whatever its form, will not fail to be sent. The infallible promise associated with prayer in the name of Jesus he aids us to comprehend in all its depth, and to adapt to our wants; but preserves from the folly of unreasonably ascribing to God a course of action, as if we might extort that which had not been determined in his counsel for our happiness. Thus it is he through whom, finally, the *fellowship* of prayer is perfected; because where he lives, there have all whom he guides to the throne of grace an actual fellowship with one another —with the Son, with the Father. Thus he forms and trains a constantly increasing number of worshippers in spirit and in truth; and those whom he here teaches to pray he teaches on high to praise. O, ye who have felt something of this, should ye not pray for the Holy Ghost? Ye who know him, should ye not pray more fervently *in* the Holy Ghost, without whom our defective speaking to God shall never be true prayer? [*J. J. Van Oosterzee*].

Evangelical Repentance.—*Verse* 10.

These words clearly describe the chief characteristics and the chief means of kindling evangelical repentance.

I. It is mourning for sin. Not feeling great terror nor shedding many tears. Natural conscience may inflame remorse and sudden judgments overcome, but sorrow from shame may work death. Godly sorrow is a bitter thing, but not mixed with despair. It is a personal practical mourning for *sin;* it pierces (pricks) the heart (Acts ii. 37) and leads to amendment of life. **II. It springs from looking to the Lord Jesus.** It is a common mistake to think that we must first mourn and then look to Jesus. The mourning springs from the looking. "They shall look upon me and mourn." We may be *convinced* of sin in various ways, but *sorrow* for sin springs from a look at the cross. In a crucified Saviour we see the malignity, guilt, and vileness of sin. All excuses are given up, and we are humbled in the dust. "A quick returning pang shoots through the conscious heart." But the arrow that wounds brings the balm that makes alive. Peter saw his master, went out and wept bitterly, and was restored. **III. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart.** There is neither mourning nor looking without the outpouring of the Spirit. All holy affections, desires, principles, and states of mind are the result of the Spirit. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Hence the precise influence conceived by the prophet is overcoming evil, imparting grace, and developing this grace in supplication. Prayer is the first result of a converted soul. "Behold, he prayeth." "The gift of prayer is not always in our power," says Lessing.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 10. Learn — 1. *That a great change will take place in the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem* —in both princes and people. On the first preaching of the gospel many of the people believed, but scarcely any of the

rulers; now all descriptions of men are to bow to the Redeemer's sceptre. 2. *The cause to which this change is ascribed is the pouring upon them of a spirit of grace and supplication.* The spirit of true religion is an emanation of the grace of God, which necessarily leads to importunate prayer. The present state of the unbelieving Jews would seem to render their conversion hopeless; but when the influences of the Holy Spirit shall descend upon them, the heart of stone shall become a heart of flesh. 3. *The great medium of effecting this change will be the remembrance of him whom their fathers crucified, and whom they themselves have pierced by persecuting his followers and continuing so long in enmity and unbelief.* A realizing view of Jesus on the cross, as slain for us, will dissolve the most obdurate spirit into contrition and godly sorrow [*Sutcliffe*].

Ver. 10. *The predictions.* The repentance and mourning of the Jews is immediately foretold, but the fact implied is his *having been pierced.* There are in truth *two* predictions: the one, that *Messiah should be pierced;* the other, that the penitent Jews *should look on him whom they had pierced.* They relate to widely distant periods. Since the first was fulfilled eighteen centuries have passed away. But it *was* fulfilled, and this gives ground of assurance that the other will be fulfilled in its time [*Wardlaw*].

1. *The gracious blessing given.* (1) Look at the *promise itself.* The Holy Spirit. First, as a Spirit of *grace.* "The gift of God's free favour, testifying to grace alone in the sinner's salvation; the author of gracious dispositions and affections in the human soul, bringing men in harmony with God's methods of grace in the gospel, and teaching them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. Then the *Spirit of supplications,* because coming *from* God. He draws immediately *to* God. He teaches all under his agency, not merely convincing them of the *duty,* but inclining them to avail themselves of the privilege of prayer. Wherever the Divine Spirit dwells, communion with God will be the characteristic feature of the favoured individual in whom he abides. When his influences come largely upon families, churches, and communities, the result will be *a concert of prayer*—a union of hearts, and a united outpouring of those hearts at the footstool of God" [*Wardlaw*]. (2) Look at the *extent of the promise.* The effusion is not fitful nor scanty, but generous and abundant—a pouring rain upon all classes, highest and lowest, individually and socially. 2. *The wonderful result.* First, "they shall *look*" with a simple, earnest, attentive, and personal look, "with trustful hope and longing, on me" [*Pusey*]. Then "they shall *mourn,*" most deeply and universally, the whole land, family by family. As males and females sat and worshipped separately, so "every family apart and their wives *apart.*"

> "I was a stricken deer that left the herd"
> [*Cowper*].

Every family apart. Apply this to ministers. The *priestly tribe* had its own *special* in the day of national mourning. "The chief priests moved the people," and thus shared their guilt. Are ministers not reminded of their shame? Is not grief becoming them when reviewing their treatment of God's people? "Who can estimate the criminality of the clergy," asks one, "during ages of corrupt and persistent oppression of the truth?" Let the guilt of our neglect and contempt of God and his word ever abase and cause us to mourn *apart.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1. *Heavens.* Creation in all its length and breadth, in all its depth and height, is the manifestation of his Spirit, and without him the world were dead and dark. The universe is to us as the burning bush which the Hebrew leader saw. God is ever present in it; for it burns with his glory, and the ground on

which we stand is always holy [*Francis*]. *Spirit of man.* The soul, immortal as its sire, shall never die [*Montgomery*].

Vers. 2—4. *A cup.* There is no greater punishment than that of being abandoned to one's self [*Pasquier Quesnel*]. *Madness.* There is no future pang can deal that justice on the self-condemned he deals on his own soul [*Byron*]. O, that way madness lies; let me shun that [*Shakespeare*].

Ver. 5. *My strength.* The multitude which does not reduce itself to unity is confusion; the unity which does not depend upon the multitude is tyranny [*Pascal*].

Vers. 6, 7. *Fire* came down from heaven, therefore restlessly works itself through all combustibles till it returns thither again [*W. Seker*]. The wrath of man is the rage of man, but the wrath of God is the reason of God [*Bishop Reynolds*].

Vers. 8, 9. *Heroism,* the Divine relation which in all times unites a great man to other men [*Carlyle*].

Feeble.

"Tis not enough to help the feeble up,
But to support him after" [*Shakespeare*].

Ver. 10. *Look.* Their eye shall affect their heart (Rev. i. 7: Lam. iii. 51); for the eye is the instrument both of sight and of sorrow; and what the eye never sees the heart never rues. The sun looketh upon the earth, draweth up vapours thence, and distilleth them down again; so doth the sun of understanding; which, till it be convinced, the heart cannot be compuncted. Sight of sin must precede sorrow for sin [*Trapp*].

Vers. 11—14. *Mourning.* The prophet uses the strongest metaphors known to human experience. No pang which death can inflict is so severe as that which wrings the heart of parents following to the tomb the remains of a first-born or an only son. It seems as all hope and glory were interred in the same grave. When President Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, a shuddering horror seized every heart throughout the land, and multitudes who had never seen the kindly leader were as deeply moved as if the blow had fallen on their own kindred. A gloomy pall settled down over all hearts and all households [*Lange*].

CHAPTER XIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **This verse completes the thought of ver. 10, ch. xi. God not only pours out the Spirit, but provides means of purification.** "The verse exhibits the two grand doctrines of the gospel—justification and sanctification" [*Henderson*]. **Unclean.]** Alluding to water of separation or purification for sin (Num. xix. 9). **2. Idols]** (ch. x. 2, *marg.*) Prevalent form of ungodliness, cut off, *i. e.* utterly destroyed. **Prophets]** False prophets, perhaps under demoniacal influence. **Spirit]** of uncleanness, opposed to the Spirit of holiness (cf. Acts xvi. 16: 1 John iv. 6: Rev. xvi. 13). **3.]** The evil denounced will be abolished; the very parents of false prophets would be the first to inflict merited punishment (cf. Deut. xiii. 6, 10; xviii. 20). **4. Prophets]** themselves would be **ashamed]** of their calling; **wear]** the badge of a prophet—assumed **to deceive]** *i. e.* to lie by imposing upon the people. **5. Say]** A dramatic representation of means by which he deceives. He is charged with wounding himself in idolatrous worship (1 Kings xviii. 28). He denies the charge; declares that they are chastisements which he formerly received in the house of his relatives or friends. **6.]** By many the words are applied to Christ. **7.]** A new turn, rather abruptly, to the Messiah, who is designated **shepherd]** and **fellow]** lit. the man of my union, *i. e.* not a neighbour, but conjoined, closely related. **Man]** Heb. mighty man, "by way of eminence" (*Virum cohærentem mihi.* Vulg.) **Sword]** Figure of any means for taking human life (cf. Ex. v. 21: 2 Sam. xii. 9; xi. 24). **Wicked Jews intended (cf. Ps. xvii. 13), and regarded as asleep, therefore summoned to perform the deed.**

Turn] Interpose in favour of the little ones (Isa. i. 25). **8.**] Bringing back the hand explained. "The dispersion of the flock will deliver two-thirds of the nation in the whole land to death, so that only one-third will remain alive" [*Keil*]. **9. Fire**] Severe affliction, to refine and purify (cf. Isa. xlviii. 10: Jer. ix. 6: Mal. iii. 3). The result, mutual intercourse and confidence between God and his people. Everything is included under these phrases (cf. ch. viii. 8: Hos. ii. 25: Jer. xxiv. 7).

HOMILETICS.

The Fountain for Uncleanness.—*Verse* 1.

These words are connected with the preceding chapter. The outpouring of the Spirit will be followed by universal sorrow, and then by forgiveness and purification. Learn—

I. That sin is moral pollution. The evil is described by two words: *sin*, which is transgression of the law; *uncleanness*, which is impurity. Sin defiles the heart and conscience, makes unfit for the presence and service of God. What leprosy was to the body, sin is to the soul; the uncleanness of the one sets forth the impurity of the other (Ps. li. 9). Education, outward profession, and religious privilege do not exempt from this corruption. "The house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" required to be washed. All have sinned and need deliverance: first from *the guilt*, and then from *the pollution* of sin. "Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." **II. That God has made provision to take away this moral pollution.** "In that day there shall be a fountain opened." The fountain comprehends forgiveness and sanctification. "The grace of Christ's Spirit, as well as the virtue of Christ's blood: whatever is necessary for both ends" (cf. 1 John v. 5, 6). 1. A fountain denotes *fulness*. It is not a well, cistern, nor reservoir; but a fountain of inexhaustible fulness. 2. A fountain denotes *sufficiency*. It is ever full and ever flowing. Enough mercy in God, enough merit in Christ, to cleanse the vilest of the vile. The laver of old had to be replenished (Ex. xxx. 18); but God in Christ justifies from the guilt and cleanses from the pollution of sin. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son *cleanseth* us from *all* sin." **III. That this provision is always accessible to men.** It is a fountain *opened*, not closed nor sealed up, as in Cant. iv. 12. The atonement is not a fountain hid and inaccessible. Men are not excluded on account of nationality and the greatness of their sin—the injustice of God's demands or inability to comply with them. 1. *Opened in eternity by the purpose of God.* Before the disease came the remedy was provided. "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." 2. *Opened in every age for all nations of the earth.* It was open from the time when it was first needed—from the time that sin came into the world. Ever since it has been opened to Jew and Gentile in every age. From the beginning to the end of the world it will ever be open, if our eyes are only opened to see it.

The Opened Fountain.

"That day" opens up a bright vision to the prophet in the darkness of his time. Looking 500 years into the future, he predicts an event at Jerusalem which displays the love of God and makes provision for the necessities of man. "There shall be a fountain," &c. This is a figure of the source and method of salvation through Christ.

I. The purpose of Divine provision. "For sin and uncleanness." 1. To *expiate sin* a necessity. This is the great problem of humanity—what all pilgrimages and penances have had in view. Christ's death atoned for sin and accomplished what Jewish sacrifices typified. 2. Then *pardon for sin* is required. Grace destroys the power of sin and delivers from its dominion. "For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

II. The freeness of Divine provision. "A fountain opened." 1. *Opened freely by Jehovah.* It is not dug by man. The Divine mind originates the scheme. Man wanders in the wilderness ready to perish, seeking water where there is none; but God opens a fountain to quench his burning thirst. 2. *Opened freely to all.* It is not sealed up, nor forbidden, but accessible to all, without money and without price. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." **III. The plenitude of Divine provision.** In Christ is unlimited fulness of grace and truth. Millions have been refreshed, and still the waters flow on with undiminished volume. "Enough for all, and enough for evermore." "The waters that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water," &c. **IV. The perpetuity of Divine provision.** "A fountain opened," and always open. It never closes. Its store is never wasted nor exhausted. It is an ever-flowing, never-failing fountain to supply every demand. Not the deceitful brook nor summer stream which vanishes away; nor the broken cistern which holds no water. It is a perpetual spring, which makes the valley of Baca a well, the wilderness glad, and the desert to rejoice and blossom as a rose. This fountain is open now—open for you. Drink, and thirst no more [*Adapted*].

"There is a fountain filled with blood" [*Cowper*].

THE PURIFICATION AND REFORMATION OF ISRAEL.—*Verses* 1—6.

That grace which pardons sin will also sanctify the soul. The promise which says, "From all your filthiness," declares also, "From all your idols will I cleanse you." Sanctification and reformation go together.

I. The purification of Israel. Many seek to get rid of the *guilt* and consequences without desiring freedom from the *stain* of sin. Repentance however bitter, tears however numerous, do not repair the evils of a wicked life. We must be renewed by grace, and washed in this "fountain for sin and uncleanness." Some of the vilest characters at Corinth were washed in a double sense. "Ye are *sanctified*, but ye are *justified* (two aspects of the same work) in the name of the Lord Jesus." **II. The reformation of Israel.** Idolatry and divination shall be utterly abolished. The very names shall be "cut off," and unmentioned. False prophets and the spirit of uncleanness shall be completely destroyed. This is done—1. *By a spirit of judgment.* They will discern between the true and the false, commend the one and avoid the other. 2. *By a spirit of zeal.* The nearest relations were to denounce those who seduced from God, and cast the first stone. Loyalty to God is needful now as ever. Love to God must be supreme, and nothing must compete with holiness and truth. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." 3. *By a spirit of shame.* Pretenders will be ashamed, and strip off the outward dress of their calling. They will rid themselves of every suspicion by disowning the profession of a prophet, and when pressed by questions evade true answers. All to ensure safety. Self-inflicted torture, fastings, and wounds in the body will not avail to save the soul. Humiliation and hypocrisy in the devotees of religion are hateful to God, who demands "simplicity and godly sincerity." Never do evil that good may come.

CHRIST WOUNDED IN THE HOUSE OF HIS FRIENDS.—*Verse* 6.

Many apply the words to the Messiah. It seems rather difficult, but very natural, so to apply them.

I. He was rejected by his countrymen. Christ was born a Jew, attended the Jewish synagogue, and lived and laboured among them. Yet "he came unto his own, and his own received him not." He was rejected by the whole nation, who shouted, "Crucify him, crucify him!" **II. He was forsaken by his disciples.**

He longed for human sympathy, and required human aid in his work. But the best friends are weak, fall short of duty, and desert their duty. His disciples fell asleep. One denied, and another sold him. All forsook him and fled away. "My friends have forsaken me," cried a great statesman. "My friends, there are no friends," uttered Socrates. Christ looked for pity in his chosen few, and there was none. **III. He is wounded now by his people.** In the domestic and social circles friendship decays and creates grief. What hurts more than lack of confidence, especially after long acquaintance? Christ is wounded—1. *By the inconsistent conduct* of his people. When their life does not accord with their profession they crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame. They act the deed afresh, and *inwardly* approve of the treatment which he received (Heb. vi. 6). 2. *By coldness and indifference.* Treating things for which he died as of no moment. Disregarding his authority, and neglecting the means of grace which he established. Christ is pierced yet, and his sorest wounds are often in the house of his friends.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. 1. The great *spring.* I will pour out. 2. The great *agent.* The Spirit of grace and supplication. 3. The *effect.* They look; they mourn; they see the fountain opened [*McCheyne*].

Vers. 2—4. *False prophets.* 1. Putting on garments to deceive, to impose upon the people, and impress them with an idea of superior sanctity. 2. Uttering words which are false. The false was always prevalent among the Jews; is with us; and seeks to meet a craving of our nature. The Word of God is complete. Nothing more can be given by pretenders to Divine inspiration. "Beware of false prophets," &c. 3. Zeal against false prophets may be great, but should always be in a legitimate method, and with prudence. 4. When false prophets are converted they are ashamed of their former deeds, and repudiate their calling.

Ver. 3. *Zeal for God against error and profanity.* Zeal requiring parental sacrifice and punishment of those whom we love. Dearest friendships should not prevent the exposure of false teaching.

Ver. 6. *Wounded.* There are four kinds of such wounds. 1. Those arising from their just reprehensions. 2. Those that result from their sufferings. 3. Those produced by our being bereaved of them. 4. Those inflicted by their improper conduct. Again; if the Lord Jesus be the sufferer, he is wounded in the house of his friends by their negligent conduct, by their selfishness, by their gloomy conduct, by their unholiness. His question is—Is this thy kindness to thy friend? [*Jay*].

HOMILETICS.

The Smitten Shepherd and the Scattered Flock.—*Verse 7.*

These words are a direct prophecy concerning the sufferings of the Saviour, and are appropriated by him to himself (cf. Matt. xxvi. 31). We condense and arrange *Wardlaw's* thoughts on the subject.

I. The victim smitten. First, the *official* character. "*My shepherd.*" The designation presupposes a *flock*, and *Jehovah's flock.* A shepherd and a flock are essential to each other. The shepherd here is one who fulfils a shepherd's functions by the appointment of another. He had himself a proprietary right in the flock as well as he for whom he acted; but here he appears, as elsewhere, in the capacity of a servant. Jehovah many times represents his people—both the typical and the spiritual Israel—under the image of a flock. Here they are his flock, cared for by a *deputed* guardian and guide. Under the character of a *shepherd* Messiah is repeatedly predicted (Ezek. xxxiv. 23: Isa. xl. 10, 11). Then we have the

personal aspect. "*The man who is my fellow.*" Various renderings have been given to the words: the man, my companion; my friend; my associate; my confidant; my equal; the man whom I have associated with myself; the man who is united to me. They convey the idea of communion, fellowship on equal terms, union, equality (cf. John x. 27—30; xiv. 9). Since Jehovah himself declares this "man" to be his fellow, we shall not rob him of his own appropriate and exclusive glory by rendering homage to Christ according to his own representation. **II. The deadly stroke.** The "*sword*" here invoked, under a bold figure, is the sword of *Divine justice*—of punitive, retributive righteousness (cf. Deut. xxxii. 40, 41: Jer. xlvii. 6, 7: Ezek. xxi. 1—5). It is addressed as slumbering, and summoned to "*awake.*" The language is prophetic, and looks forward "to the fulness of time" when the "*man*"—Jehovah's fellow—was to appear. Manifestations of God's justice had been seen, but from the entrance of sin into the world this sword might be said to have slept in its scabbard. Now the law must be vindicated, a nobler victim smitten; not sinners themselves, but their willing and Divine substitute. The *smiting*, then, includes *all* the sufferings—the substitutionary and atoning death of Jesus. Jehovah himself summoned the sword. "*He* bruised him." "*He* put him to grief," &c. Yet were all in the strictest sense *voluntary.* Jesus undertook the task with the full view of all it would cost. "Lo, I come," &c. **III. The twofold result.** First, "*the sheep shall be scattered.*" We are naturally led to see by the language of our Lord that the "scattering" from him of his adherents and *friends*—which formed a part, and to a spirit of sensibility like his not a trifling one, of his sufferings—was included in this prediction (cf. Matt. xxvi. 31—56). The verse which follows relates to the dispersion of the mass of unbelieving Jews—an act of judicial vengeance for their unbelief and rebellion. The *second* result is, "*I will turn* (or *turn back*) *my hand upon the little ones.*" "The little ones" here describes *tender affection* (cf. Matt. xviii. 6, 10, 14). Jesus appeared to his disciples, and accosted them as "children" and "little children." The language is that of *love* and *kindness*, not, as some think, that of threatening and judicial severity. The hand is that of God; the "little ones," children of God in Jesus Christ; and it is "*turned*," or turned back, "*upon them*" for gracious care and protection. The hand of avenging justice had smitten the victim and was fully satisfied, but these "little ones" were set free. They may be scattered for a time, but not lost. He will "turn his hand" to gather, bless, shield, and save them. The fulness of blessing rests in Jehovah's favour.

In the Furnace; or, Twofold Effects of Trial.—*Verses* 8, 9.

These words predict the destruction of two-thirds of the inhabitants of Judea, by famine, pestilence, and wars; but the remaining third part, after severe testing and affliction, will come out of the furnace a spiritual and purified people, enter into a new relationship with God, and enjoy all the blessings of his covenant. The former part has been fulfilled; the latter part is carried on now, and will terminate in the conversion of the Jews to God.

I. Some are destroyed. There will be a frightful sweep of judgments, and "two parts therein shall be cut off, and die." In the visible Church there is a mixture of good and bad, sound and unsound. When God tests the Church by affliction, many are proved unworthy; receive not the correction, but harden themselves, and perish in their sin. **II. Others are preserved.** "The third part shall be left therein." They will pass through the fire, and be refined as silver and gold by the process. The process is slow, but the issue certain, even with the Jews. How is it in our afflictions? All will have to pass through the fire. The reprobate metal will be cast away, the genuine gold will be refined and ennobled. "Afflictions sent by Providence melt the constancy of the noble-minded, but con-

firm the obduracy of the vile. The same furnace that hardens the clay liquefies gold; and in the strong manifestations of Divine power Pharaoh found his punishment, but David his pardon" [*Colton*].

"'Tis a physic that is bitter to sweet end" [*Shakespeare*].

AFTER THE FURNACE; OR, PURIFIED INTERCOURSE.—*Verse* 9.

The purifying effect of trial will be earnest calling upon God, and reciprocal intercourse with him. "The door of the furnace leads to the closet," says one. Christians pray best when they have endured trials. We adapt this Outline—

I. **The exercise.** "They shall call." 1. How *simple* is true prayer! A "call," not in pompous tones nor lengthy words. "The simplest form of speech that infant lips can try." 2. How *earnest* is true prayer! A call, an intense feeling for God, a crying out for his help. 3. How *constant* is true prayer! "They *shall* call." A constant practice with them. 4. How *sure the ground* of true prayer! "On my name." Not a venture, not an uncertain cry for pity, but a personal, believing application to God who answers. II. **The mutual joy.** *First*, God says, "It is my people,"—chosen to stand in special and loving relation to him. He spares them in trial, and fits them for their high destiny. He turns to them in covenant grace, and with renewed and complacent delight "lifts upon them anew the light of his countenance." *Second*, they renounce their unbelief, and cling to him. Weaned from idolatry by affliction, they declare in gratitude and humility, "Jehovah is my God." They not only worship him above other gods, but own him as their portion. His favour to them is life, and his loving-kindness is better than life. His gifts are precious, but he himself exceeds them all. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 7. *The little ones.* How *amazing* is this promise of God, when we contemplate this hand in its omnipotence, and think at the same time on our own utter insignificance, our deep unworthiness, our woeful weakness! We count it much to stoop one day in the year to be little with little ones. God stoops anew from time to time to bless the most humble with special favour. Christ preached the gospel to the poor; chose his first subjects from fishermen and publicans. *Animating* truth! Almost before we are aware of our lost and low condition the outstretched hand presents itself, a token and pledge of communion, strength, and guidance. What evidence more clear that he has no thoughts of anger towards us? In the aid which our fellow-men render there is alternately much hardness and much weakness, so much unwillingness and distrust, that it is often better to be forsaken than surrounded by men. But God's tender hand brings balm to the most painful wound wrought by men's hands, and our littleness or weakness, if possible, brings us yet more within his beneficent reach. May this, so rich a fountain of consolation, ever be to us a *sanctifying* thought! We must stoop low ere we can taste the consoling truth. Humility is the foundation of all spiritual blessings; nay, God himself can build upon no other. Direct yourselves constantly to this promise. Though he may turn his hand upon the little ones, it is not, as some think, that they may always remain weak and little, but grow in the knowledge and grace of Christ. Show, then, that his hand is not stretched out to you in vain, and in turn be followers of God by your care over the little ones that surround you [*J. Van Oosterzee*].

Vers. 8, 9. Learn—1. In the times of severest judgments upon the visible Church, God may have a few preserved. "The third part shall be left." 2. Al

though these few may be preserved, they will not be entirely free from trial. They must be tested and exercised in the fire. "I will bring the third part through the fire." 3. The design of this trial is to purify them from dross, and make them shine the brighter in God's service. "I will refine them as silver," &c. "Fiery trials make golden Christians."

To them a God. I will be that wherein they shall be satisfied, I will be all things that men righteously desire: life and health, and food and abundance, glory and honour and peace and all things [*Augustine*]. The promise is oftentimes renewed through the prophets, oftentimes fulfilled in Christ, whenever the Church is recalled from listlessness by fiery trials, and through them her children are restored to deeper devotedness and closer union with God [*Pusey*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1. *Unclean.* If we did not first take great pains to corrupt our nature, our nature would never corrupt us [*Clarendon*]. That must needs be deadly which could be healed by no other way but the death of Christ. Who, therefore, seriously considering that his sins could in no other way be expiated than by the death of the Son of God himself, would not tremble to tread as it were this most precious blood underfoot by daily sinning? [*Bishop Davenport*].

Vers. 2—4. *Idols.* Idolatry has its origin in the human heart. Men love sin, and do not want to be reproved for it; therefore they form for themselves a god that will not reprove them [*J. H. Evans*].

"With what unutterable humility
We should bow down, thou blessed God, to thee,
Seeing our vanity and foolishness,
When to our own devices left, we frame
A shameful creed of craft and cruelty"
[*Landon*].

Vers. 4, 5. *Lies.* All deception in the course of life is indeed nothing else but a lie reduced to practice, and falsehood passing from words into things [*South*]. It is too much proved that with devotion's visage and pious action we do sugar over the devil himself [*Shakspeare*].

Ver. 7. *Little ones.* Louis IX., king of France, was found instructing a poor kitchen-boy; and being asked why he did so, replied, "The meanest person hath a soul as precious as my own, and bought with the same blood of Christ" [*Arvine*].

Vers. 8, 9. *Fire.* I remember some years ago I went into a glass-house; and, standing very attentive, I saw several masses of burning glass, of various forms. The workman took a piece of glass, and put it into one furnace, then he put it into a second, and then into a third. I said to him, "Why do you put this through so many fires?" He answered, "O, sir, the first was not hot enough, nor the second, and therefore we put it into a third, and that will make it transparent." Thus we must be tried and exercised with many fires, until our dross be purged away, and we are made fit for the Master's use [*Whitfield*].

CHAPTER XIV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Day**] specially appointed to inflict judgments and manifest **his glory. Spoil**] accumulated by inhabitants of Jerusalem and fit for the enemy. **2. Nations**] to take and plunder the holy city, to rob houses and ravish women (cf. Isa. xiii. 16). **Half**] The able-bodied sold into slavery or condemned to work in mines. **Rest**] Poorer not **cut off**] *i. e.* not transported, but

permitted to perish in ruins. **3. Against**] The enemy doomed in turn to destruction by Jehovah, as when he fought for Israel at Red Sea. **4. Mount**] Which for situation and height is most convenient to help his people. **His feet**] touch, and the result is an earthquake (Ps. lxviii. 8: Nah. i. 5). The mount is split through the middle latitudinally; one half falls to the north, and the other to the south. **A great valley**] is formed for the escape of God's people. **5. The**] Lit. *my* mountains—Zion and Moriah specially sacred to Jehovah [*Moore*]—or mountains formed by *my* power. He had given them separate existence. The level opening would extend to **Azal**] a place near Jerusalem, of which no trace exists at present. **Like as**] the flight from the earthquake—swift, universal, and in fear, as in the days of Uzziah (Amos i. 1). **The Lord**] The second person indicates the joy of the prophet in hailing the shining retinue of Jehovah's appearance. **Saints**] Holy angels (Deut. xxxiii. 2, 3: Dan. vii. 9, 10: Matt. xxv. 31: Rev. xix. 14). Some say redeemed men as well as holy angels. **6.**] A period of unmitigated calamity, which comprehends the long centuries of oppression, cruelty, and scorn to which Jews have been subjected since the destruction of Jerusalem [*Henderson*]. **Clear**] Lit. *precious, splendid* (cf. Job xxxi 26). There the moon is described as walking *preciously*, or *splendidly*, i. e. in brightness; but **dark**] lit. *condensed*, from a word to *contract*, to *draw together*. "The words describe the passing or vanishing of the brightness of the stars, answering to the prophetic announcement that on the day of judgment sun, moon, and stars will lose their brightness or be turned into darkness" (Joel iv. 15: Matt. xxiv. 29) [*Keil*]. **7. One day**] Solitary in its kind, and unparalleled by any other; neither perfect day nor perfect night. "One continuous day without night (Rev. xxii. 5, 25). The millennium described" (Rev. xx. 3, 7) [*Henderson*]. **Known**] only to Jehovah, and should restrain the curiosity of men. **8. Living**] i. e. running, perennial, refreshing; opposed to stagnant, noxious waters; an image of copious streams of gifts and grace from the Church, the source of all blessings. *Eastern*, i. e. Dead sea; *Western*, i. e. Mediterranean. **9.**] In consequence of the universal spread of the gospel. Jehovah will be **king**] i. e. supreme, and his **name one**]. Idolatry will cease, and the unity of the Godhead unanimously recognized. **10.**] The whole land **turned**] levelled to a plain to elevate Jerusalem, which will be restored to its former grandeur (Mic. iv. 1). This figurative of spiritual elevation. The boundaries cannot be determined with certainty. **11. Dwell**] securely, without fear of attack or captivity (Isa. lxv. 19). **Utter destruction**] Exemption from *curse* the ground of this security. No more civil or national punishments on account of sin, implying that the nation is holy. **12—15.**] The hostile nations forming the final confederacy will be punished (cf. **Isa. lix. 18**: Ezek. xxxvii: Rev. xix). **Plague**] always an infliction from God. This stroke most terrible. "**A** living death; the *corruption* (Gal. vi. 8) of death combined in ghastly union with the conscious sensibility of life" [*Fausset*]. **13. Tumult**] Civil discord another way of destruction, created by panic (cf. Jud. vii. 22: 1 Sam. xiv. 20). **Lay hold**] Seeking help, but finding arms turned against one another. "The grasp of the other's hand is a hostile one in this case, the object being to seize him, and, having lifted his hand, to strike him dead" [*Keil*]. **14. Judah**] The whole covenant people will carry on the conflict at Jerusalem, seize as booty the costly possession of the heathen, and visit them with retribution for the plunder of Jerusalem (ver. 2). **15.**] So complete will be the destruction, that beasts of burden, used in warfare, and all cattle will be destroyed by the same plague as men [*Keil*]. **16.**] Some heathen will be preserved, converted to God; **go up**] i. e. join in solemn acts of worship. **17. Not**] come up; penalty will be inflicted upon absentees. Upon them **no rain**] i. e. the blessings of Divine grace will be withdrawn from them. **18. If**] The menace repeated with special application to Israel's hereditary foe. "Egypt will join the procession Zionwards, or feel the retributive curse." **19.**] **Sin** including its effects (cf. Num. xxxii. 23). **20. Bells**] suspended from the neck, as tinkling ornaments. **Holiness, &c.**] The sacred symbol engraved upon the diadem of the high priest (Ex. xxviii. 36). The distinction between sacred and profane would cease. The commonest things would be holy, because devoted to God. **Pots**] Vessels used for cooking would be as holy, be upon a par with those considered most sacred, viz. "*the bowls* before the altar." **21.**] The same idea carried out fully. Not only temple-pots would be equal to sacrificial bowls, but every common pot in the city and in the land would be deemed as holy as the utensils of the temple, and would be freely used for sacrifice. **Canaanite**] No more godless members of the covenant nation; all worshippers would be righteous and sincere, and "the whole kingdom of God will be transformed by the Lord into a holy of holies (see Rev. xxi. 22, 27)" [*Keil*].

HOMILETICS.

The Grand Assault and the Wonderful Deliverance.—*Verses* 1—6.

Interpreters take this chapter, some literally and others symbolically, believe it to have been partially or to be fulfilled wholly in future ages. In whatever sense explained, it sets forth the great contests of the Christian Church and the great principles of God's moral government.

I. The grand assault. All nations are gathered together for battle against Jerusalem. 1. *An assault at the appointed time.* "The day of the Lord cometh." **God suffers his people to be reduced and to pass through fiery trials; but as "day"**

dawns after night, so a period is chosen to vindicate his judgment and punish his foes. 2. *An assault in accordance with the Divine purpose.* "For I will gather all nations." God is supreme over "all nations," and will accomplish his purpose in spite of the opposition and often by the wrath of man. Historians record events and look no higher. But prophecy exhibits "God in history." He predicts, and he fulfils. 3. *An assault with partial success.* We have assault, capture, and plunder, and sad is the picture of rifled houses and dishonoured women. This should remind us of future conflict with the powers of darkness—teach us not to expect peace and calm. A fearful encounter may be at hand, the outlook may soon darken, and the onslaught may convulse the Church. But when the enemies seem to triumph victory will be snatched from them. "*Then* the Lord shall go forth and fight against those nations." **II. The wonderful deliverance.** God is not hidden in obscurity. He comes *forth* in wondrous deeds. "Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people." 1. *Deliverance by supernatural means.* The mount was cleft asunder, "a very great valley" was made, and a place of escape was provided by the special power of God. Nothing can prevent the escape of God's people. Mountains are removed and valleys are filled for the way of God's redeemed. "Behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and will tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft." 2. *Deliverance under God's leadership.* God himself goes forth against the foe, and fights for his people. (1) *God was clad in awful majesty.* Again, "the glory of the Lord stood" upon the mount; the earth quaked beneath his feet, and the stars above grew dim. The physical world marked the events in the spiritual. (2) *God was attended by splendid retinue.* "My God shall come, and all the saints with thee." Angels stand before his throne, wait orders, and fly on missions of mercy and judgment. They are represented as going with God for the execution of his purpose. They attended the first, and will come with the second appearance of the Lord Jesus. "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment."

The Remarkable Day.—*Verses* 6, 7

Many refer these words to different periods, but we take them as connected with one event. The coming of the Lord will produce great changes in nature. The day will bring night, and the evening light. Its order will be reversed. When the natural course of events would bring darkness, a bright light shall dawn.

I. A day of mingled light and darkness. "Not the clearness of unclouded day," says Wardlaw, from whom we borrow, "nor the darkness of a starless night. Something between both, or a combination of both—darkness here and light there." A representation of the dispensation before and since the days of Christ. Mercy and judgments, comforts and afflictions in the Christian Church. In the world truth and error, Christ and antichrist in mighty conflict. Now night, and then day. "The light is neither clear nor yet dark," "not day nor night;" but the darkness will pass away and the true light soon shine. **II. A day only.** "It is one day." Some say one long, continuous day of grief, which makes the saints cry, "How long?" But take it in another sense. Whatever be the length, it is *only a day.* In the darkness light is not wanting in which we may work and walk. The sun does nor entirely set. The clouds will soon be scattered. Brief, comparatively, is the period, though the joy of day and the repose of night be absent. This should uphold and console in our "fight of afflictions." **III. A day of remarkable close.** When evening is naturally expected, lo, the splendours of day break forth. "At evening time it shall be light." To God's people life may be clouded, and to God's cause night may be dark. But ere long "the Lord shall be" their "everlasting light, and the days of" their "mourning shall be ended." **IV. A**

day only known to God. "Which shall be known to the Lord." Its changes and consequences, its precise duration, are not revealed to men. We should not be curious in asking, "O, my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?" Let us obey the injunction, "Go thou thy way till the end be,"—wait in patience and earnest preparation,—"for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." (Dan. xii. 13).

Light at Evening.—*Verse* 7.

The promise or prophecy, says one on this verse, is that "light shall come at a time when it is not natural, when in the common course of things it is not looked for. It would be no surprise that light should come at noonday; we expect it then; it is just what we are accustomed to see. But if, when the twilight shadows were falling deeper and deeper, with a sudden burst the noonday light were to spread around, that would be a surprise. *Lux è tenebris* has received and continually receives manifold fulfilments" [*Jacox*].

I. In human experience. Few lives are spent from early day to evening time in the light of God. Sometimes at midday, and often in the night, light shines. 1. *In the conversion of the sinner.* Sin is darkness. The penitent struggling with sin and temptation, forsaking the world and turning to God, sees no light and often feels forsaken. At length hope dawns, a voice is heard, and mercy shines. 2. *In the life of the Christian.* Abraham learned that God could provide in extremity, "Jehovah Jireh." Jacob found that things which appeared against him at one time were only passing clouds for a brighter light. Israel in Egypt and David in trial discerned "the silver lining." God turns the shadows of life into morning, and to those who trust him the night shineth as the day. "Light is sown"—like seed cast into the ground—"for the righteous," and will in due time, and after needful process, be reaped in golden harvest (Ps. xcvii. 11). **II. In the history of the Christian Church.** In Jewish and apostolic, in the dark and middle ages, in the Reformation and times of revival, this truth has been illustrated. The Church has passed through days of gloom and starless nights; dreary years of tempest, frost and snow, in wintry blasts and wearisome times, but light has come. God's *ways* may seem dark and mysterious, impenetrable and hostile, but in *him* no darkness dwells. Light and truth will break forth from his word and providence to chase away superstitions and error, to make the world happy, intelligent, and pure. "*At evening time,*" improbable or impossible as this may appear, "it *shall* be light." "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the seas." **III. In the end of life.** In "life's evening" light is desired. "Nothing is more common than the craving and demand for light a little before death," says an author. "Open the windows," cried M. de Lescure, on his dying bed. Rousseau wished to have "a parting look at the glorious orb of day." Goethe's request was for "more light, more light." Dark indeed has been the evening time to many. But as the sun often struggles through the clouds of day and sinks in brilliant light, so the chamber of death has been filled with light and glory from the Sun of righteousness. To Bunyan's Mr. Fearing "all was well at last." The gloom of the poet Cowper endured long, but passed away at length. Dr. Johnson dreaded death through life, but met it with hope and unusual patience (*Secular Annotations*). Happy those to whom the valley of the shadow of death is lit up with God's presence! Unhappy those whose darkness is eternal night! "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness."

> "Through night to light. And though to mortal eyes
> Creation's face a pall of horror wear,
> Good cheer, good cheer! The gloom of midnight flies,
> There shall a sunrise follow, mild and fair" [*Rossgarten*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Vers. 1—5. 1. God is supreme in the calamities of the Church and the events of nations. 2. His supremacy may be questioned through the triumph of the enemy and the inactivity of his people. 3. But a day will come when this supremacy will be finally settled, to the comfort of one and the destruction of the other. Christ must be acknowledged to be Lord of heaven and earth.

Ver. 3. *As in the day of battle.* Former experience a comfort in after ages. What a fund of consolation in God's past dealings for present use!

Ver. 5. *The Lord my God shall come.* Bright visions in dark days. The prophet lifts up his head, sees the coming help, and joyfully exults in the vision. 1. The Lord shall come. 2. When he does come he is my help. "*My* God." Hence some may deny and others scoff, but I will patiently wait and constantly trust in him.

Vers. 1—7. God's providence. 1 Strangely checkered. 2. Wonderfully perplexing. 3. Benevolently working. Or, "1. The mixed condition of the righteous in this world: in knowledge, outward circumstances, inward comforts, and wavering holiness. 2. God's wisdom in allowing it: to subdue their corruption, to exercise their graces, to bring them to dependence upon himself. 3. Our consolation under it: God notices it, the mixed events work together for good, the scene is short. 4. The happy termination of all: in a state of unmingled good, in an unexpected hour. Finally, Are we the people concerned in it? [*Bradley*].

HOMILETICS.

The Living Stream.—*Verses* 8—11.

The blessings which should diffuse themselves in their abundance and value are set forth under the image of a stream; a parallel to which is found in Ezekiel's waters which swept through the desert, healing stagnant pools and fertilizing scenes of death (xlvii. 1—12). Notice—

I. **The source of the living stream.** "Living waters shall go out from Jerusalem." Connected with the Christian Church are all the means of grace and the blessings which result from the diffusion of Divine truth. "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God." II. **The direction of the living stream.** "Half of them toward *the former*, i. e. the eastern or Dead Sea, into which they might naturally flow, and toward *the hinder*, i. e. the western or Mediterranean Sea, which natural waters could not reach." It flows in all directions, without hindrance, "from sea to sea." III. **The perpetuity of the living stream.** The heat of *summer* shall not dry them, like the deceitful brook of Job; the frosts of *winter* will not bind them. These streams are not transient, like Cherith, nor muddy, like the Nile; but an unfailing supply in all seasons, turning the desolate heritages into the garden of the Lord. "In summer and winter shall it be." IV. **The fertility of the living stream.** The effect of this stream will be to subjugate the world to God. Idolatry will be renounced, and he will be acknowledged universal King. Kingdom after kingdom shall be won, until all *willingly* bow to him and crown him Lord of all. "All nations shall serve him."

The Future Exaltation of Zion.—*Verses* 9—11.

Nothing will prevent the perpetual flow of the living waters. The land will be levelled to a plain, the city elevated and restored to former grandeur. "Jerusalem, as the residence of the God-King, is the centre of the kingdom of God; and in the future this is to tower high above all the earth. The figurative description is

attached to the natural situation of Jerusalem, which stood upon a broad mountain ridge, and was surrounded by mountains which were loftier than the city. The exaltation is a figurative representation of the spiritual elevation and glory which it is to receive" [*Keil*].

I. Zion will be completely restored. It will recover from the ruin of verse 1. The rubbish of cities and countries in which God delights shall be taken away, and calamities end in the complete restoration of the Church. There will be a great moral awakening, from which streams of life shall issue to reconstruct society and change the world. **II. Zion will be securely inhabited.** None shall go out by flight, nor be taken as captives (vers. 2 and 5). 1. *The city will no more be exposed to danger.* Neither captured nor plundered again. "No more utter destruction." 2. *The city will be no longer under a curse.* Sin brought a curse, and a curse extermination (cf. Josh. vi. 18). It will be holy, no more tainted with an accursed thing (Mal. iv. 6), and a type of that city where "there shall be no more curse" (Rev. xxii. 3). 3. *The city will be perpetually secure.* No danger without from hostile assaults, no danger from desolation within; not only safely inhabited, but *permanently* secure from that time. "There shall be no more utter destruction." **III. Zion will be gloriously exalted.** "And it shall be lifted up." Lifted up above danger and ruin into perfect security and glory. 1. *Honoured above other societies and cities.* 2. *Honoured by the supremacy of Jehovah* (ver. 9). Gross polytheism and refined idolatry will cease. No other object of worship, no other God but Jehovah will be acknowledged. Fading crowns encircle the brows of earthly monarchs, but an eternal diadem belongs to him "on whose vesture and thigh is written the name *King of kings and Lord of lords.*"

The Chastisement of the Enemy.—*Verses* 12—15.

These words might be taken in connection with verses 1—7, but the prophetic pause in description of the purified Church directs special attention to the chastisement of the hostile nations.

I. The enemy are smitten with the plague from God. The Lord smites "all the people that have fought against Jerusalem." The picture is most horrible and appalling. While standing their flesh shall consume away, their eyes decay in their sockets, and their tongue petrify in their mouth. **II. The enemy are confused with panic among themselves.** "A great tumult from the Lord shall be among them." Fear will disturb their ranks. Each will find a foe in his comrade, and while grasping another's hand for help will find "every man's sword against his fellow." "When there is no unity in God each seeks his own, suspects another, and is ready to be fanned into a flame." **III. The enemy are completely frustrated in their designs.** 1. *They failed in their means of defence.* The cavalry, mules and camels, the entire encampment shared in the consternation and destruction (ver. 15). 2. *They were overcome by God's people.* "Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem." The whole covenant people took part in the conflict, and were victorious through God. 3. *They were robbed of all their spoil.* The wealth and apparel which they had taken from others were taken from them. Whatever the world takes from the Church shall be regained, and converted nations shall bring their treasures for the adornment and defence of Zion (cf. Isa. lx. 16, 17).

The Converted Remnant.—*Verses* 16—19.

The nations that have taken part against Jerusalem shall be humbled; a remnant will acknowledge Jehovah, and as friends and allies worship with the people whom they sought to destroy. Their conversion is described as going up yearly to the feast of tabernacles at Jerusalem.

I. They observe the feast in the spirit of unity. Homage will be paid to Jehovah by voluntary worshippers and "commissioned representatives" in communion with the chosen race. Religious ordinances will become as a bond of union among the nations of the earth, make them feel and act as one people. From all quarters will they come; not in the spirit of enmity as before, not as in the days of monkish superstition, but in the spirit of love and fealty. **II. They observe the feast in a spirit of gratitude.** The great feast reminds them of past deliverances and mercies. "In like manner the nations will celebrate the goodness which has brought them through their tedious and perilous wanderings in this life to the true and everlasting kingdom of peace and rest" [*Lange*]. In every heart Zion will be enthroned as the city of the great King. Then shall prayer and praise wait for God, and the vow be performed. To all the members of God's family on earth will "her walls become salvation, and her gates praise." **III. Nations who refuse to observe the feast will be punished.** A punishment which God alone is said to inflict. 1. *Absence of rain to some.* "Upon them shall be no rain." God only "gives rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." 2. *Plague is threatened to others.* "If the family of Egypt go not up there shall be plague." This is accounted for by some in the natural peculiarities of the country, which was refreshed by channels cut in the ground (Deut. xi. 10). But Egypt was an old and special enemy of Israel, depended upon rain for the overflowing of the Nile, and must either join in procession to Zion or feel the curse of God. What a lesson for us! The worst are not excluded from hope, may join the Church of God and receive his mercy. But God will suspend his favours from those who despise his ordinances. No rain will fall upon those that refuse his grace. "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted."

The Holy City.—*Verses* 19, 20.

The meaning of these words seems to be, that the day will come when holiness will be the prevalent feature, and the actions of common life will be as much the worship of God as the sacrifices on the altar; when common things will be consecrated to God, and "Holiness to the Lord" inscribed everywhere.

I. The inhabitants of the city will be holy. "No more the Canaanite in the house." No Canaanite in the Church, self-righteous in spirit and unholy in life; no Canaanite among the people. No godless member in the covenant nation; no people laden with sin and under the curse. "Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness." **II. The transactions of the city will be holy.** Business in the market will be as sacred as worship in the temple; the furniture of the house as holy as the vessels of the sanctuary. Wars and contentions will cease, trades and handicrafts will be hallowed, cooking-pots and drinking-cups consecrated to God. Restrictive ceremonies will be abolished, and everything in ordinary use will be employed in the spirit of devotion. "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth."

Religion in Common Life.—*Verses* 20, 21.

The holiness of that day penetrates things secular as well as sacred, and is set forth in three symbols. Bells upon the horses as holy as the mitre of the priest; the meanest vessels of the temple as sacred as the holiest; and the utensils of domestic life consecrated as sacramental cups. We adapt from Wardlaw.

I. The religious spirit will predominate in the ranks of common life. No Canaanite to make gain or take advantage; no enmity between priests and people, but all ranks of life bound together by loyalty to Jehovah. **II. The religious**

spirit will predominate in the actions of common life. "Men are not to become monks or anchorites; the ordinary conditions of human life are not to be reversed; but, on the contrary, the infusion of grace will be so large and general that every rank and class will feel it, and its effects will be seen in all the relations of life, purifying and elevating without upturning or destroying" [*Lange*]. 1. *There will be no divorce between secular and sacred things.* No divorce between morality and religion, between domestic life and the service of God. 2. *There will be a recognition of God's claims in secular and sacred things.* Nothing withheld from God. The most solemn acts of the temple and the common duties of life—the offering of sacrifices and the yoking of horses—will be done for God. Persons and property devoted to him, and every department of life under the domain of conscience. "Her merchandise and her hire shall be for holiness to the Lord: it shall not be treasured nor laid up" (Isa. xxiii. 18).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 9—15. 1. The mercy of God (vers. 9—11). 2. The severity of God (vers. 12—15).

Vers. 12—15. The precedent promises that were so great and glorious the prophet doth now further enlarge and illustrate. *First* the conquest of the enemies (12—15); *next* the profession of Christ among all nations of the world (16—19); and *lastly* the sanctity of the Church (20, 21). The conquest of the enemies is set forth, *first*, by God's strange judgments upon them (12); *secondly*, by the means—both they shall despatch one another, and Judah shall fight bravely against them (13, 14); *thirdly*, their wealth and substance shall become a prey (14); *fourthly*, their horses of service and all the beasts they bring with them shall be as strangely plagued as the men themselves (15) [*Trapp*].

Vers. 16—21. 1. The worship of God's house. 2. The holy character of its attendants. 3. The punishment of those who neglect. "Those who desire to partake of the grace and salvation provided by Christ must 'come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God.' They must partake faithfully, joyfully, and reverently of the word and sacraments and other means of grace, and the refreshing rain and dews of the Holy Spirit will fall upon them. But if they will not comply with these conditions their souls will be parched and will wither away with spiritual drought" [*Wordsworth*].

Ver. 20. ***Prevalent holiness.*** 1. Holiness is the sweet result of all dispensations toward the Church. 2. Nothing is so profane but it may be sanctified and made holy. 3. Holiness doth then bear full sway when that which was against God shall be consecrated to him, for the *bells of the horses* had been employed against the Church [*Hutcheson*].

Vers. 20, 21. Three things specially characteristic of "*that day*" — the period of the restoration of Israel, and of the fulness of the Gentiles. 1. *The cessation of all the distinctions of ceremonial holiness.* The sanctity of *mere things* shall no longer exist. No places give holiness or acceptance to sacrifices. Men "*everywhere* lift up holy hands" and find the same acceptance. 1. *The universal prevalence of personal and domestic consecration to God.* 3. *Purity of ministry and membership in the Church of God.* Learn—1. The necessity of seeking *true* holiness — holiness of heart. 2. Study practically the duty of *carrying religion into everything.* 3. Let the Churches of Christ aim more and more at *scriptural purity of communion* [*Wardlaw*].

Holiness to the Lord. 1. The aim of worship. 2. The beauty of common things. 3. The rule of daily life. "In days of yore nothing was holy but the beautiful" [*Schiller*]. Happy day when holiness shall mark the Church of God, when seen in every purpose and in every action! "Then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XIV.

Vers. 1—3. *The Lord goes forth.* How sweetly doth God dispose of all second causes, that while they do their own will they do his [*Bp. Hall*]. Didst thou never hear that things ill got had ever bad success? [*Shakespeare*].

Vers. 4, 5. *Mountain removes.* Nature is but a name for an effect whose cause is God [*Cowper*]. In nature things move violently to their place, and calmly in their place [*Bacon*].

Vers. 6, 7. *Light.* As surely as a good man's sun goes down it shall rise again. If the darkness be caused by depression of spirit the Holy Ghost will comfort him; if by pecuniary loss or personal bereavement the presence of Christ shall be his solace; and if by the cruelty and malignity of men the sympathy of the Lord shall be his support. It is as ordinary for the righteous to be comforted as for the day to dawn. Wait for the light, and it will surely come; for even if our heavenly Father should in our last hours put us to bed in the dark, we shall find it morning when we awake [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 8. *Living waters.* The grand feature of the latter day is copious and continuous effusions of grace; no longer intermittent and scanty, or of small extent, but radiating in all directions at once, permanently filling every channel, and limited only by the wants of the race. Quickly but surely, with the same noiseless energy with which the great providential forces work, do these spiritual agencies perform their work [*Lange*].

Ver. 11. *Safely.* The weakest believer is safe, because, believing, he is within the strongest of all defences [*Anon.*].

Vers. 12—15. *Plague.* It is one of the greatest praises of God's wisdom that he can turn the evil of men to his own glory [*Bp. Hall*].

Vers. 16—18. *Worship.* It is for the sake of man, not of God, that worship and prayers are required; not that God may be rendered more glorious, but that man may be made better, that he may be confirmed in a proper sense of his dependent state, and acquire those pious and virtuous dispositions in which his highest improvement consist [*Blair*].

> "Look to thy actions well;
> For churches either are our heaven or hell"
> [*G. Herbert*].

Vers. 20, 21. *Holiness to the Lord.* Zechariah is one of the most sublime and impassioned among "the goodly fellowship of the prophets." It seems as if the Spirit designed to teach the world by him, the last but one in the prophetic line, that if prophecy was to become mute (as it became for about four centuries after Zechariah) its silence was not due to any failure or exhaustion of power in the Divine author of prophecy. No; the light of the sunset of prophecy in Zechariah is brilliant and glorious as its noonday splendours. He passes on to the evangelization of the heathen, the conversion of the Jews, to the last struggle and overthrow of all antichristian powers, and to the full and final victory of Christ and the everlasting glory and felicity of his Church [*Wordsworth*].

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

MALACHI.

INTRODUCTION.

The Writer. It has been a subject of doubt whether Malachi was a real or official name. Little is known of his personal history. The Book of Nehemiah does not mention him, "although he was a zealous fellow-labourer with that patriotic governor, and greatly aided him in his endeavours to secure a willing and grateful obedience to the Divine law. In this, however, he does but share the fate of those psalmists who, on the return from captivity, composed many songs for the temple service. They too are unknown to fame. Their songs found a place in the Hebrew Psalter, but no chronicle carried down their names to after ages." Dead to name and fame, "they are not dead to 'use.' Even to this day their works do follow them" [*Cox*].

The Age. According to the tradition of the synagogue, he lived after the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, and was contemporary with Nehemiah. This statement is fully borne out by the affinity of the book written by the prophet with that written by the patrict. Both presuppose the temple to have been already built. The same condition of the Jews is described. They both condemn foreign marriages, and enforce the due payment of tithes, which had been neglected. They likewise correct abuses which had crept in with respect to sacrifices, and reprove their countrymen for their want of sympathy with the poor. In all probability, Malachi occupied the same place with respect to Nehemiah which Haggai and Zechariah did with respect to Zerubbabel. That the former was assisted in the discharge of his duties by prophets may be inferred from the charge brought against him by Sanballat (Neh. vi. 7). He may therefore be conceived of as having flourished somewhere about the year B.C. 420 [*Henderson*].

The Book. Malachi is composed of four short chapters in English, and three in Hebrew. It is the last of the Minor Prophets, and is called "The Seal of the Prophets." He completes the Old Testament, and prepares the way for the New, and is therefore fitly called a messenger [cf. *Words.*]. "Malachi is like a late evening which closes a long day, but he is at the same time the morning twilight which bears in its bosom a glorious day" [*Pusey*].

THE CONTENTS ... chiefly of a threatening character. "The most enforced and orderly division is that which is now generally adopted. The book opens with a brief introduction or preface (chap. i. 1—4.), the theme of which is, God's love to Israel a reason fo a response of love to him. After the introduction come the three main sections of the book: 1. (from chap. i. 6 to ii. 9) on the impiety and profanity of the priests, 2. (from ver. 10 to ver. 16, chap. ii.) on the heathen marriages of the priests d people; and 3. (from ii. 17 to iv. 4) on the day of the Lord" [*Cox*].

THE STYLE differs from the earlier prophets, and the book has been classed in the ... age of the Hebrew language. He lacks the grandeur of Joel and the passion of Habakkuk, and indicates the influence of the Great Synagogue "in his formal and scholastic tone." "Though his language is pure and beautiful, and has a certain poetic rhythm, he is not so much a poet 'singing in full-throated ease' as a scholar elaborating an edifying discourse. It is curious to note how faithful he is to a single form of composition, and that a very simple one, whatever the theme he takes in hand. Invariably, without a single exception, he develops his subject in the following order:—first, he briefly states his thesis; then he states the sceptical objection with which he supposes it may be met; and lastly, he triumphantly refutes the objection" [*Cox*]. This method is simple, but the meaning deep. He speaks of moral and religious duties to God, and of justice and mercy to man. We are reminded of the thunders of Sinai and the claims of the law. Our thoughts are carried forward to the terrors of the Great Day, and the curse that will fall upon the impenitent. But the Sun of righteousness will shine with unclouded splendour, and the morning star is already seen to announce its advent. Thus at the close of the Old Testament "we get a glimpse of Christ, whom we are to meet and with whom we are to walk in the New Testament; and of the Baptist, who came before him in the power and spirit of Elijah, to prepare his way, and to attest that this was he of whom Moses and the prophets did write."

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Burden**] (Massa) A heavy vision full of toil and weight. "What is the burden of the Lord?" was asked scoffingly from the prophets. As a punishment for the blasphemy of the people, God declares, "I will burden you" [cf. *Lange*: Jer. xxiii. 33—40]. **2. Loved**] A fact in their history and the foundation for reproof. **Hated**] Not a proper and formed hatred (for God could not hate Esau before he sinned), but only a lesser love, which, in comparison of the great love for Jacob, seemed as if it were not love [*Pusey*]. Jacob and Esau are illustrations of God's purpose in the election of grace. Their history typified and conditioned that of their posterity (cf. Rom. ix. 11). **3.**] The condition of the country, desolate and inhabited by (**dragons**) jackals of the wilderness, a proof of this hatred. **4. Edom**] cannot recover herself. Her perpetual ruins illustrate love to Israel rather than to her. **Border**] still the resort of marauding tribes of the desert. **Indignation**] Curse (cf. Isa. xxxiv. 5). **5. See**] the ineffectual attempts of Edom, and then acknowledge the greatness of Jehovah in and beyond the land of Israel. **6.**] Expostulation to priests, who should *love* Jehovah as sons, and **fear**] him as servants (Ex. xx. 12). **Say**] Instead of confessing guilt, deny the charge and demand proofs. **7. Polluted**] i. e. any sacrifices the bread or food of God (Lev. xxi. 6, 8; xxii. 25: Num. xxviii. 2). Blind and lame were polluted bread. **8. Governor**] If customary to offer heathen rulers presents proportionate to the dignity of the receiver, the circumstances of the giver, and the value of the favour sought, should God be insulted by offering things which *they* would reject? **9. Pray**] An earnest call to repentance say some; others, that it is ironical. Think you that God will be persuaded by polluted gifts? No; amend your ways. **This**] Contemptible offerings your doing. **Means**] Lit. from your hand. Will God **regard**] you? **10. Nought**] So avaricious were they that the meanest things were not done without payment. Some say this frees the priests from excuse for carelessness, for the least service, such as shutting the door, was paid for. Others regard the words as a wish: "*Oh that some among you* would not open my sanctuary to such profane intruders (close the doors against such worshippers and sacrifices), *and would not kindle the fire* on mine altar to no *purpose!*" Better **without** worship than such as this [cf. *Keil* and *Words*.]. **11.**] The name of God, treated with contempt by priests, will receive universal homage. Jewish worship will be rejected, and Gentiles offer spiritual worship in the Church of Christ (Matt. xxi. 43). **Place**] (John iv. 21—23: 1 Tim. ii. 8). **Incense and pure offerings**] Prayers (Rev. v. 8), thanksgiving, and praise (Heb. xiii. 15, 16). **12. But**] a renewal of charge against priests in verse 7. **Profaned**] habitually. **Say**] by acts and life. **Table**] i. e. the altar, polluted by worst offerings. **Fruit**] and *food*, i. e. the provision of the altar. **13. Weariness**] An oppressive drudgery, not an honourable privilege. **Snuff**] Do not hide your contempt. **Torn**] Taken by violence; not fit to eat, and unlawful to offer (Ex. xxii. 30: Lev. vii. 24; Ezek. iv. 14). **14. Deceiver**] The hypocrite, professing one thing and intending another. The people now reproved. **Male**] required by law (Lev. i. 3, 10). **King**] An argument for service from the majesty of God. **Dreadful**] Jews had no fear nor reverence for Jehovah. **The heathen**] will reproach all who offer to God corrupt and offensive sacrifices.

HOMILETICS

SPECIAL FAVOURS DEMAND SPECIAL RETURNS.—*Verses* 2—5

The sovereign benevolence of Jehovah and the ingratitude of the Hebrews in the time of the prophet are strikingly contrasted. To the petulant question, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" which is only the first of a series which are put in the course of the book, the answer is direct and conclusive—in showing greater kindness to their progenitor Jacob than he had done to his brother Esau [*Hend.*].

I. Distinction above others an act of Divine love. From the first Israel were chosen and set apart, and to the last were they loved in chastisement and rebuke. Nothing was due to their own industry and virtues. 1. *Their temporal blessings were greater than those of others.* We have only to look around to see Divine goodness. Protected homes, restored health, and fruitful lands. The land of Israel was specially favoured, while Idumea was sterile, desolate, and the haunt of jackals. Israel had been restored, but Edomites were under the ban. 2. *Their religious privileges were greater than those of others.* Edom and heathen nations had not the temple and the oracles of God. "He hath not dealt so with any nation" as

with the Jews (Ps. cxlvii. 10). God's love is the source of every blessing. He makes one differ from another. The distinctions of men and the advantages of nations result from his sovereign goodness. Thus the love of God is—(1) proved from his word: "I have loved thee;" and (2) confirmed by our life. In our past and present condition we are reminded of gratuitous love. "The Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even *you above all people*, as it is this day." **II. Distinction above others a reason for implicit submission.** The people ask for proofs of love. God appeals to facts to silence scepticism. 1. *God's love may be questioned.* "Wherein hast thou loved us?" If God afflicts we think him unkind; if he withholds what we desire we question his mercy. Pride and petulance have dimmed our vision. We have formed the habit of doubting until it has grown strong, and we constantly cry "Wherein?" 2. *God's love may be denied.* Men cry, "Give me the ocular proof, make me see't." If evidence of God's providence is not seen they deny it. The Jews could only say, We are few and feeble, unable to defend our houses and gather our harvests, the frequent prey of some and the perpetual scorn of others. This insolent challenge is a common, a prolific root of sin, a fountain of ingratitude and rebellion. The doctrine of election may be mysterious, but greater difficulties arise from its rejection. God says that he loves us, and gives abundant proof of it. What more do we wish? All misery is due to ourselves. We must be silent, for God is just. "Why dost thou strive against him? (quarrel with and dispute his dealings, Isa. xlv. 9) for he giveth not account of (i.e answereth not) any of his matters" (Job xxxiii. 13). **III. Distinction above others an inducement to grateful service.** The election of Israel was "not of works, but of him that calleth." Descent from one and the same patriarch was not the reason of their choice. The prophet and the apostle declare it to be of free grace. This a reason—1. *For grateful service.* God's love lays us under obligation to love him in return. But amid striking proofs of it we are blind, ungrateful, and dissatisfied. "Wherein hast thou loved us?" 2. *For constant service.* "God's everlasting love was uniform in itself, manifold in its manifestations" [*Pusey*]. If God never ceases to bless we should never cease to serve. "I am constant as the northern star, of whose true, fixed, and resting quality there is no fellow in the firmament" [*Shakespeare*].

"Love me little, love me long" [*Marlowe*].

Lessons from the Ruin of Edom.—*Verses 3—5.*

Jacob and Esau were brothers, but God did not deal with them both alike. Their personal history was repeated in their posterity. The doom of one was pointed to as a lesson of providence and love to the other.

I. **The ruin of Edom a monument of God's anger.** "I hated Esau." In whatever sense we take the word "hated," greater love was shown to Jews than to Edom. But God has reasons for his acts. The Edomites were "the children of the sword," and "he that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword." Hence they brought the anger of God upon themselves in "a form of that Divine and wholesome law of retribution which we find in our own lives no less than in the written word," says one. **II. The ruin of Edom a warning to other people.** What happened to them may happen to us. "Your eyes shall see." *God's people* may be assured of his love towards them and his providence over them when they see the enemy punished and frustrated in their designs. *The world* should learn that God "will be magnified from the border of Israel." **III. The ruin of Edom a proof of Jehovah's supremacy over all nations.** The judgments that fell upon Edom taught the Jews, and the world through the Jews, that God was not only the God of Israel, but the God of the whole earth. By contrasting the condition of Israel with that of Edom we learn that Jehovah is supreme over all

nations, saying to one, Thou shalt live, and to another, Thou shalt perish; that his government is merciful to his people and retributive to his enemies.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. Malachi's message. 1. The *nature* of the message. "The *burden*." 2. The *authority* of the message. "The *word* of the *Lord*." 3. The *design* of the message. "To Israel." 4. The *medium* of the message. "By Malachi."

Ver. 2. Learn—1. That God's love is not dispensed according to any merit in us. "I have loved thee." 2. That God's love cannot always be seen in our outward condition. "Wherein hast thou loved us?" 3. That love may often be seen when we compare our condition with that of others. "I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau." 4. That God's love should always beget gratitude to God in return. "'I have loved *you*,' God would say, 'with a special love, a more than ordinary love, with greater tokens of love than to others.' So God brings to the penitent soul the thought of its ingratitude" [*Pusey*]. 5. That when there is no gratitude in return for his love God will punish. The sequel proves this. Lycurgus, when asked why he set down no punishment in his laws for ingratitude, replied, "I have left it to the gods to punish."

Vers. 2, 3. *Jacob* viewed chiefly in his national capacity as Israel, and taken by the apostle as a type of the elect (Rom. ix. 13). *Esau* viewed as the Edomite nation show that the acceptance or rejection is not spiritual, that a principle of election runs through all history, and that God, as absolute sovereign, bestows religious privileges and Divine blessings.

Ver. 4. The world's defiance of God's decree. It breaks down, he builds up; it builds, he breaks down [*Lange*].

Vers. 5, 6. Observe the repetition of the word *border* in the contrast between them. Edom is the *border* (*gebûl*) of wickedness; but the Lord will show his power and love over the *border* (*gebûl*) of Israel [*Words.*]. *The Lord magnified*, &c. 1. By his gracious acts to Israel. 2. By sending his word to the Gentiles. 3. By his judgments over all the earth (Rev. xv. 4).

HOMILETICS.

Building up without God.—*Verse* 4.

Edom's temporal desolation and her resolve to repair it may be taken as a figure of our moral condition and the efforts of men to improve it.

I. Man's moral condition is a ruin. "We are impoverished; lit. *ruined*." Sin creates distance from God, and brings poverty and ruin. There is no misery like that which sin brings, and no misfortune so disastrous as that in which it ends. Sin "brought death and all our woe into the world;" and death is passed upon all men, for all have sinned. **II. Men try to repair their moral condition by wrong means.** They are sensible of their misery,—"we are *impoverished*,"—feel their distance,—"we will *return*,"—and resolve to build up their broken fortunes,—we will "*build* the desolate places." 1. *Men's efforts are directed to a wrong end.* "We will return." Return to what? Return to our kingdom and associations. Thus men cling to creeds, societies, and institutions, and not to God. "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto me." 2. *Men's efforts are put forth in a wrong spirit.* "But *we will* return and build." Here we have pride, presumption, and opposition to God. Men resolve, but God will hinder. At Babel men were frustrated in purpose, confused in tongues, and scattered over the earth. 3. *Men's efforts are built on a wrong foundation.* "They shall call them the border of wickedness." If the foundation be bad, the higher it is run up the more labour

is lost, and the more tremendous the fall. Empires, houses, and fortunes built on selfish principles will never stand. "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong" (Jer. xxii. 13). **III. When men try to repair their moral condition by wrong means God will overthrow their efforts.** "They shall build, but I will throw down." Providence pulls down as well as builds up (Ecc. iii. 3). God can crush every effort and break down every edifice of man. "I will work, and who shall let?" (hinder, turn it back, Isa xiv. 27) (xliii. 13). He overturns our bodies by disease and death; our families by discord and bereavement; business by failure and loss; nations by famine and sword. 1. *This overthrow is terrible.* Places were *desolate*, buildings *thrown down*, broken into fragments. The firmest foundation, the most fortified walls of sin, will not avail before God. "The Lord hath stretched out a line (not to build, but destroy, 2 Kings xxi. 13: Isa. xxxiv. 11), he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying: therefore he made the wall and the rampart to lament" (Lam. ii. 8). 2. *This overthrow is irrevocable.* The "indignation" is "*for ever.*" The destruction can never be repaired. This seen in the tower of Babel and the cities of the plain. Joshua's curse fell upon the rebuilding of Jericho (cf. Josh. vi. 26: 1 Kings xvi. 34). The apostate Julian could not contravene the word of God concerning Jerusalem. When he had gathered materials and commenced the work the tempest from heaven filled him with dismay, and forced him to confess the hand of God. "He breaketh down, and (so that) it cannot be built again" (Job xii. 14). But is there no way of building that we may be secure and happy? Must our efforts to recover ourselves perpetually fail, and our hopes be for ever disappointed? Build on Christ, the true foundation, for no other foundation can any man lay; build by the aid of the Spirit, and in humble confidence in the promise of God, then your work shall abide. "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith." "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

Titles without Honours.—*Verse* 6.

Upon the fact that respect is shown by inferiors to superiors Jehovah founds his right to honour and reverence due to him as Creator and Ruler. But God condemns the contempt priests and people displayed in offering blemished sacrifices.

I. God is our Father, and should be honoured. The prophet does not appeal to the law, but lays down the truth, which none will dispute, that Jehovah is the Father of Israel. If God, therefore, is a father, the honour of sons is due to him. Heathen philosophers taught that parents were household gods, and were to have all possible respect. "To God and our parents," said Aristotle, "we can never make recompense." 1. *God claims honour from us.* "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Ex. xx. 12). "Doubtless thou art our father" (Isa. lxiii. 16: Mal. ii. 10). 2. *Men withhold the honour due to him.* "Where is mine honour?" They do not honour him with their substance, but despise him in heart and act. "Do ye thus requite the Lord?" **II. God is our Master, and should be served.** "If I be a master, where is my fear?" God is acknowledged to be our Lord. He should be served in filial not in slavish fear. We are not to find fault with his employment, or engage in it by force and constraint. "They *say* and *do* not." Our service must be earnest and constant. In all fear should we obey and submit to him (1 Pet. ii. 18). Fidelity to our conscience will ever be rewarded. "He that waiteth on his master shall be honoured;" here by the promise and presence of God, at length by the approval of God. "Well done," &c. "If any man serve me him will my Father honour."

The Sins of the Priests.—*Verses* 6—10.

Turning from the people, the prophet addresses the priests, who should be leaders in holiness, but are foremost in bringing the service of God into contempt. *They* were under special obligations to sanctify him, but they profaned his name and caused Israel to sin.

I. Their services were a violation of all law. A son should honour his father, and a servant obey his master (ver. 6); but they withheld from God what they demanded from the people, and slighted him more than any creature. 1. *The law of nature was dishonoured.* Fair words and grand titles require consistent life. Nature teaches honour to parents and respect to masters, reproves want of reverence to God, and testifies against those who honour in word and dishonour in life. "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" 2. *The law of God was violated.* God expressly forbade the offering of the blind, the lame, or any evil-favoured sacrifice. "Whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer: for it shall not be acceptable for you. Ye shall not offer unto the Lord that which is bruised, or crushed, or broken, or cut" (Lev. xxii. 20, 24). If it be lame, or blind, or have "any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God" (Deut. xv. 21: Neh. v. 14, 15). 3. *The law of common civility was disregarded.* "Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee?" (ver. 8). What insult to offer God what a mortal would disdain! Yet what a contrast between God's table and that of our princes! If an earthly monarch would neither accept our gift nor espouse our cause with such approach, can we expect God to bless? "Will *he* be pleased with thee or accept thy person?" **II. Their services were offensive to God.** They despised his name and offered polluted bread upon his altar. 1. *Their offerings were mean in substance.* "Ye offer the blind for sacrifice; is it not evil?" They put God off with what was worth nothing. Darius probably supplied them plentifully with victims for sacrifice, but they offered the worst. "God despises not the widow's mite, but he does despise the miser's mite," says Moore. 2. *Their offerings were mercenary in spirit.* They would neither kindle a fire nor shut the door without pay (ver. 10). "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?" How niggardly we are in God's service! Ever crying, "What profit shall we have?" Thinking more of gain than duty. The meanest service for God will not be unrewarded. The servants of the temple had their tithes, cups of cold water have their benediction, and God is not unjust to forget labours of love. But if we become covetous and unfaithful, every one for his gain, from his quarter (Isa. lvi. 11), then we pollute the altar and bring the service of God into contempt.

True Spiritual Service.—*Verses* 7, 8.

In the condemnation of what was evil in the spirit and substance of ancient sacrifice we learn the right method of approaching God, the true nature of spiritual service.

I. It should be intelligent. We should never offer the *blind* or ignorant service, and worship we know not what. "For he hath no pleasure in fools." **II. It should be earnest and hearty.** Not *lame* and half-hearted, but upright and sincere; not *sick* and feeble, but vigorous and cheerful. The homage and communion of the highest part of man; for God is a spirit, and can only hold communion with spirit. "If my soul is not engaged in my worship, it is even as though I worshipped not" [*Confucius*]. **III. It should be reverential.** If heathens were careful to offer sacrifices without blemish, how reverential should we be in the sanctuary of God. Never enter without due preparation; never utter hasty and ill-arranged thoughts, nor offer slovenly prayers and praise. Be as anxious to worship God as to discharge

secular functions. God deserves our best, let us not dishonour him with unsound and grudged gifts. "Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 6. It becomes us to do what God enjoins. First, because he has a *right* to command us. He is Sovereign, we are subjects; Master, we are servants; Father, we are children. Secondly, because all his commandments are *reasonable.* None arbitrary or tyrannical. Thirdly, because his commands are *beneficial.* All enjoined has special regard to our welfare. "In keeping his commandments there is great reward." Fourthly, because God's commands are *practicable.* All imply power to obey. If not possessed, yet attainable; if not in nature, yet in grace; if not in ourselves, yet in him whose authority we recognize, and who is always accessible [*Jay*]. God is the *Father* of the faithful—(1) By creation; (2) by preservation and governance; (3) by alimony; (4) by fatherly care and providence; (5) by faith and grace, whereby he justifies and adopts us sons and heirs of his kingdom [*Pusey*].

Ver. 7. *Is it not evil?* If we worship God *ignorantly* and without understanding we bring the *blind* for sacrifice; if we do it *carelessly* and without consideration, if we are cold, and dull, and dead in it, we bring the *sick;* if we rest in the *bodily exercise,* and do not make heart work of it, we bring the *lame;* and if we suffer vain thoughts and *distractions* to lodge within us, we bring the torn [*Matt. Henry*].

Polluted bread. Because—1. It does not correspond with the requirements of God's law. 2. It is offered with impure mind and life. If temple purifications were necessary of old, how much holiness is needful now! *Contemptible table.* In what way can we now pollute the table of the Lord? (1) In the *Sacrament,* when we ourselves partake of it unworthily, or do not enough arouse the consciences of others. (2) *In life,* when we allow in ourselves, or in others committed to us, a half-way devotedness to the Lord [*Lange*].

Vers. 9, 10. These words are difficult, but may contain—1. *A charge against the priests.* You begun, and continued to insult God, by worthless sacrifices, and brought all the consequences upon the people. Not from aliens, not from the custom of your fathers, but *from your hand hath this been.* 2. "*An ironical appeal, covering an implied menace.*" Bring your maimed sacrifices, press God with your prayers, *will he regard your persons,* in the spirit in which you serve him? Some say—3. *A call to repentance and prayer for the mercy of God.* "I pray you, beseech God, that he will be gracious unto you." 4. *A rejection of priestly intercession.* An indignant appeal is made to their own consciences. If you have brought this evil upon the worship of God, if your hands are tainted with sinful offerings; are *you* fit to pray for the rest? Try it on, you will not succeed. God will reject you! "He sums up with an entire rejection of them, present and future: *I have no pleasure in you;* it is a term of repudiation (cf. 1 Sam. xviii. 25), sometimes of disgust (Jer. xxii. 28; xlviii. 38: Hos. viii. 8), *neither will I accept an offering at your hands*" [*Pusey*]. 5. To *silence excuse.* You have nothing to say for such careless offerings. You know what is right, and you are paid for the smallest service you perform. 6. *A wish to close the doors against such proceedings.* Who among you will shut the doors, and keep such worshippers out of the temple? Better close the sanctuary than open it to subserve selfish and hypocritical purposes—better have no offerings at all than vain offerings which God will not accept (Isa. i. 11—15) "Away with your vain oblations! What purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me!"

HOMILETICS.

THE GREAT NAME HONOURED.—*Verse* 11.

The priesthood is to be transferred, and the Gentiles will become worshippers of Jehovah in sincerity and truth. A prediction is given of the future glory of God's name.

I. Great by the universality of its revelation. "Great among the Gentiles," "great among the heathen," great "from the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same." The name, the perfections of God, shall be known from east to west — the greatness of God shall be clear and prevalent as the orb of day. "Gentiles shall come to the light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising (lit. sun-rising, Isa. lx. 3). **II. Great by the purity and prevalence of its worship.** When Jehovah's greatness is known, then incense and sacrifice will be offered to him, which are not defiled. 1. *Pure worship.* "A pure offering"—"not the blind, the lame, and the sick,"—pure from carnal ordinances and the corruptions of human life. Offerings which spring from hearts sanctified by the Holy Ghost, and fragrant as incense from the altar. Prayer, praise, and thanksgiving will be holy and acceptable to God. 2. *Universal worship.* "In every place," not confined to Jerusalem, Canaan, or any locality. This implies the abrogation of the old dispensation, and the universal spread of the Gospel. "From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the Lord's name is to be praised" (Ps. cxiii. 3).

MAN'S ESTIMATE OF GOD'S WORSHIP.—*Verses* 12, 13.

The people were poor, and offered the worst sacrifices. The priests connived at this to secure their gains, and thus profaned the name and despised the service of God.

I. God's service was burdensome. "Behold, what a weariness is it!" God requires *willing* service. Nothing is a greater drudgery than service without love. Many are weary in God's cause. What should be a pleasure is a toil. The Sabbath is a loss of time. Money and gifts presented to God are wasted. Everything done for God is useless. "Wherefore this waste?" **II. God's service was despised.** "Ye have snuffed at it," treated it contemptuously, think it a trifle to blow away with your breath. If we wrongly estimate God's service, we shall be vexed with his demands. Who likes to give to any person whom they disregard? To despise anything God-like is a symptom of a base heart. "He that despiseth his ways shall die."

> "Such acts
> Of contumacy will provoke the Highest
> To make death in us live" [*Milton*].

GOD'S ESTIMATE OF MAN'S WORSHIP.

These words may be taken in another sense (orig.) "You have said, behold what a weariness it is, a matter of weight, whereas you might have blown it away, it was so trifling."

I. What we think to be great is very little. Little in its substance and spirit—little in comparison to our ability, and God's claims upon us. What paltry gifts we offer to him who gave himself for us! "Stiff in opinion, always in the wrong" [*Dryden*]. **II. What we think will be acceptable may be rejected.** Sacrifices unsuitable and wicked will be cursed (ver. 13). 1. *Because offered in a spirit of indifference.* We put God off with anything. 2. *Because offered in a spirit of deception.* Jews offered a female under pretence they had no male in their flocks. 3. *Because offered in a spirit of falsehood.* "The liar, under stress of danger or desire, vows a pure, and then when the peril is past or the desire gratified, offers an impure or blemished beast." God cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked!

GOD'S MAJESTY A MOTIVE FOR TRUE SERVICE.—*Verses* 12—14.

Because God's greatness is known and God's majesty dreaded among the heathen, they should offer the best sacrifice. David prepared the materials, and Solomon built the temple, under a deep sense of God's greatness. "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness" (1 Chr. xxix. 11; 2 Chr. ii. 5). **I. God's great majesty calls for due reverence.** "Honour to whom honour is due," is a maxim of social intercourse. What honour, then, must there be due to the Omnipotent, the Infinite, and only wise God! How unreasonable for man to reflect upon his majesty by offering inferior when we can offer superior service! "Our hearts should adore a spiritual majesty, which it cannot comprehend, and, as it were, lose itself in his infinitude. We must believe him great without quantity, omnipresent without place, everlasting without time, and containing all things without extent; and when our thoughts are come to the highest, let us stop, wonder, and adore" [*Bp. Hall*]. "Who so great a God as our God?" **II. God's spiritual nature calls for spiritual worship.** Formal worship and bodily exercise in waiting upon God, do not honour him. "If this hypocrisy, this resting in outward performances, so odious to God under the law, a religion full of shadows and ceremonies, certainly it will be much more odious to do so under the Gospel, a religion of much more simplicity, and exacting so much the greater sincerity of heart, even because it disburdens the outward man of the performance of legal rites and observances" [*Chillingworth*]. Christian sacrifice of prayer and praise must be intelligent and sincere, not outward, slight, and superficial; internal, for only with the spirit can we be earnest and sincere; spiritual as opposed to ritual, to anything outward. God is a Spirit (not matter or form), and they that worship him must worship him in *spirit* (spiritually and sincerely) and in *truth* (truthfully in desire and life) (John iv. 24). **III. God's universal dominion demands loyal obedience.** "My Name is dreadful among the heathen." Men have no fear of God before them, treat him as they do a fellow-creature whom they regard, and by whom they are overawed. This is the root of ignorant, heartless service, of irreverent systems and theologies of the present time, says a writer. To correct this error, God reveals his name, insists upon his demands, and sets forth his supremacy and universal dominion. He is a God to whom we have to render account, whose presence and power we cannot shun—a Father who loves and redeems us; we should therefore constantly and cheerfully submit to his authority, and obey his will. God is not dethroned, nor does he reign over a decaying empire. He must and will be obeyed in freedom or force. "The Lord most high is terrible; he is a Great King over all the earth."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 11. The Jewish sacrifices had defects, partly incidental, partly inherent. Incidental were these, with which the prophet had upbraided them; inherent (apart from their mere typical character), that they never could be the religion of the world, since they were locally fixed at Jerusalem. Malachi tells them of a new sacrifice which should be offered throughout the then heathen world, grounded on his new revelation of himself to them. *For great* shall be *my name among the heathen.* The prophet anticipates an objection which the Jews might make to him. *What then will God do unto his great name?* Those by whom he would replace them would be more worthy of God in two ways—(1) in themselves; (2) in their universality [*Pusey*].

Every place. 1. Canonical hours abolished. 2. Holy places abolished—since we cannot be always in them. 3. Every time and place consecrated (cf. *Treas. of David*, Ps. cxiii. 3), or the daily universality and purity of Divine worship.

Ver. 14. *King.* God is a *King*—a *great* King—a great King who *is feared.* "As God is alone Lord, through his universal providence and his intrinsic authority, so he alone is King so great,

that of his greatness, or dignity and perfection, there is no end" [*Pusey*].

Cursed. The description and doom of the false worshipper.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Vers. 2—5. *Loved you.* Ingratitude is too base to return a kindness, and too proud to regard it; much like the tops of mountains, barren indeed but yet lofty; they produce nothing, they feed nobody, they clothe nobody, yet are high and stately, and look down upon all the world about them [*Dr. South*].

Ver. 3. *Waste.* Divine curses are not merely imprecations, impotent and fruitless desires; they carry their effects with them, and are attended with all the miseries denounced by God [*Cruden*].

Ver. 6. *Honoureth.* One of the best elements of character as well in a child as in a man, is reverence. This is the feeling due to parents and to God, our Father in heaven. It is more than respect; it is respect blended with awe. One void of reverence unconsecrates all the mysteries and sanctities of life [*Dulce Domum*].

Vers. 7, 8, and 12, 13. *Accept person.*

"When once thy foot enters the Church, be bare
God is more there than thou, for thou art there
Only by his permission. Then beware;
And make thyself all reverence and fear."
[*G. Herbert.*]

Ver. 10. *Nought.* "His money perish with him," said the pious marquis of Vico, "who prefers not one hour's communion with Christ before all the riches and pleasures of the world." "Covetousness debaseth a man's spirit" [*Tillotson*].

Ver. 14. *Deceiver.* We never deceive for a good purpose; knavery adds malice to falsehood [*Bruyère*]

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **The charge is still urged against the priests, who are warned if they do not reform they will be deprived of enjoyments, and made objects of shame. 2. A**] Lit. *the* curse denounced (Deut. xxvii. 15—26). **Have cursed**] Lit. have cursed them severally. The curse has already begun in *each one* of their blessings. Blessings pronounced by the priests upon the people are intended, say *Keil* and others, and not tithes, revenues, and portions of sacrifices. The word may be taken generally. **3. Corrupt**] Lit. rebuke the seed] *i. e.* forbid its growth, and bring failure in crops (cf. Joel i. 17: Hag. i. 11). Though priests did not cultivate land, yet they would suffer from dearth. Some give, rebuke *the arm*, *i. e.* dry up the strength, neutralize the duties performed by priests at the altar. **Dung**] of victims, which should be burned outside the camp (Ex. xxix. 14: Lev. xvi. 27), would be spread upon their faces; a sign of ignominy and contempt. **One**] Lit. they (indefinite) will carry you away to it (where it is deposited); and treat you as dung (1 Kings xiv. 10). **4. Know**] by experience, that this commandment] *i. e.* the decree to punish, shall henceforth be substituted for my covenant with Levi, or the priesthood. They forfeited the blessing, and turned the covenant of peace into woe. Better understand, that they were warned to take heed that the covenant] might *continue* with the priestly tribe as in the beginning, and not become null or void. **5.**] Nature of the covenant described. **Life and peace**] Nouns not in the genitive case. "Peace" is the sum of all the blessings requisite for well-being. Jehovah granted life and salvation to Levi, *i. e.* to the priesthood, for fear, viz. as the lever of the fear of God; and Levi, *i. e.* the priesthood of the olden time, responded to this Divine intention. "He feared me" [*Keil*]. **Afraid**] Often united to fear, expressing terror, which men are forbidden not to feel before men (Isa. viii. 12—13) [*Pusey*]. **6.**] Levi preserved this fear in office and life. **Truth**] Instruction in the law was in truth. **Iniquity**] No injustice was practised in his life, nor was truth perverted by selfishness and self-interest **Walked**] Intercourse with God was progressive and confidential. **In peace**] "Equipped with the salvation

bestowed upon him by God" (ver. 5) [*Keil*]. **And equity**] Lit. *plainness* and straightforwardness, opposed to *deceit*, or crooked dealing. The consequence of faithful discharge in duty was the bringing back, *i. e.* the turning of many from sin to God's fear. **7.**] This was the duty, the vocation of Levi, *i. e.* of the priesthood. Beautiful description of priestly functions. **Keep**] Preserve, store up, to distribute. **Knowledge**] The negative and positive precepts of the law; for people **seek the law**] *i. e.* instruction in God's will, from his lips. **Messenger**] Interpreter (cf. Hag. i. 13). **8. But**] A remarkable contrast to their pious fathers. They taught for hire, and had respect to persons; departed from God themselves, and caused others to fall by their scandalous example. **Corrupted**] by false teaching, made the law not a light for duty, but a license for sin. **9. Therefore**] Jehovah, no longer bound by a covenant which they have broken, withdraws blessings, and makes them contemptible. **10.**] A fresh section, "the condemnation of marriages with heathen women (vers. 10—12), and of the frivolous dissolution of marriages with Israelitish women, which was the natural consequence of the former" (vers. 13—16) [*Keil*]. The same course as in previous rebukes adopted (cf. Neh. xii. 23—31 with this section). **One**] Common origin, which gave them a new relation to each other. **Treacherous**] A violation of duty to God was an offence against each other, on account of this common relationship. **Covenant**] (Ex. xix. 5, 6; xxiv. 8: Deut. xiv. 2.) **11. Holiness**] Profaned or desecrated by marriages expressly forbidden. **Judah**] *i. e.* the whole nation, commits this abomination **in Israel**] a holy nation!—and in **Jerusalem**] the capital of the nation. **12. Cut**] Punish. **Master and scholar**] Lit. him that watcheth, and him that answereth. The watcher goes his rounds by night to keep guard, the other *answers*, *i. e.* responds to his cry (cf. Illus. end of ch.). **13. This**] A second sin performed. **Tears**] By ill treatment their wives were driven to weep at the altar. Hence God will not accept the **offering**] nor bless the offerer. **14. Say**] Why does he not accept? **Witness**] The people are not ashamed, and wickedly ask why? *Jehovah* declares himself (an avenging witness, some) of the marriage which took place (cf. Prov. ii. 17), which should have been sacred. The divorced wife tenderly called a wife and companion of joys and sorrows of youth, and a wife of the covenant for life made between them. **15.**] Most difficult verse of all prophecy. Taken by many as recalling the institution of marriage, of Divine sanction from the beginning. Did Jehovah not make *one flesh* (Gen. i. 27), why only one pair? Had he not the **residue of the Spirit**? His creative power was not exhausted; he might have created many women for one man. That he might seek to perpetuate a **godly seed**], a design counteracted by frequent divorce [*Lange*]. Others say, that the Jews defended their conduct by the precedent of Abraham, who took Hagar to the injury of Sarah, his lawful wife. To this the prophet replies: "No one (ever) did so in whom there was a *residue of intelligence* (discriminating between good and evil): and what did the one] (Abraham, to whom you appeal for support) do, seeking a goodly seed? His object (viz. not to gratify passion, but to obtain the seed promised by God) makes the case inapplicable to defend your position" [*Hengs.*]. Many explain it according to ver. 10. He made (us Israelites) one. Our isolation from other nations was not because *there was no residue of the Spirit left for* the world. Why, then, did he thus isolate us? **One**] (Heb. *the* one) people? That he might have a goodly seed, *i. e.* have a nation, the repository of his will, and a witness for him among idolatrous peoples. **16. Putting away**] Divorce. **Covereth**] They wrap up or cover their sins as with a garment. **17.**] This verse really belongs to the following chapter. A class of murmurers addressed (Jewish sceptics, or wicked heathens), who enjoyed prosperity, excused themselves (**wherein?**) declared, that God **delighted in evil doers, and sneer, Where is the God of judgment?**

HOMILETICS.

Priestly Blessings turned into a Curse.—*Verses* 1—5.

The rebuke to the priests is followed by an admonition to hear the Word and reverence the name of God, lest he curse their blessings and dishonour their persons.

I. The nature of the curse upon the blessings. In whatever sense the curse may be taken, it is an awful judgment, a solemn warning to all. 1. *Their own persons were cursed.* "I will even send a curse upon you." This was a reversal of the original promise for obedience, "I will command my blessing upon you." 2. *Their blessings were cursed.* "He does not say, I will send you curses instead of blessings, but I will make the blessings themselves a curse" [*Pusey*]. (*a*) *Spiritual blessings* may be cursed; the ministry of the Word, and the means of grace; Sundays and sermons may be despised, increase the guilt and aggravate the condemnation of men. (*b*) *Temporal blessings* may be cursed. "Corrupt your seed." Riches, children, and the very food we eat may do us no good. The curse from heaven may fall upon them. "Let their table be made a snare before them, and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap." **II. The reason for the curse upon the blessings.** 1. ***They neglected the Word of God.***

"If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart." The Word was personal in appeal; "this commandment is for *you*;" and solemn in authority, yet they heeded not. The Word must not simply be *heard*, but pondered in the mind. God's authority must be seen and felt in it. It is a matter of life or death, and must not be trifled with. "Ye do not lay it to heart."

2. *They despised the Name of God.* "Give glory unto my Name." Glory is due to God, and should be the aim of priestly and Christian conduct—the rule of life for the house of Aaron and the house of Israel. But God is dishonoured by despising the ordinances of his house and living heedless of his Word. "To the greater glory of God," was the motto of Ignatius Loyola. **III. The design of the curse upon the blessings.** "Ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you" (ver. 4.). 1. *They were admonished to return to God.* God desired to keep his covenant with them, and punishment was intended to reform them. This would they feel, and bitterly confess. God ever designs to make men happy, and keep them from misery. 2. *They were admonished for the sake of others.* "God willed to punish those who at that time rebelled against him, that he might spare those who should come after them. He chastised the fathers, who showed their contempt towards him, that their sons, taking warning thereby, might not be cut off. He continues to say what the covenant was, which he willed to be if they would repent" [*Pusey*]. Every warning given to men concerning their sins, is a proof of God's mercy, and will convince them that their destruction results from their own ways. "I have sent this commandment unto you."

Failure in Official Duties.—*Verses* 2, 3.

By cursing blessings, God means that he will render the instructions and efforts of the priests ineffective. When they raised the hand to bless, he would manifest displeasure. He would neutralize their duties performed at the altar [cf. *Keil*].

I. By rendering them incapable of official duties. "He will rebuke their *arm*," *i. e.* dry up their powers, like the waters of the sea. The arm is the symbol of strength and active labour. From him that hath may be taken away what he hath, if abused. God can wither the force and fervour of ungodly ministers. Power is lost by continuance in office for which men are not qualified. Their prayers are sin, their knowledge hardens, and their "arm shall be clean dried up." **II. By righteous punishment in discharging official duties.** God threatens sore evils. 1. *They would be treated with contempt.* As they had despised him, so they would be repaid in ignominy and shame — be made as the refuse of their sacrifices. 2. *They would be swept out of office.* As mere cumber, and unworthy of the temple, "One shall take" them away with the dung. "I will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till all are gone" (1 Kings xiv. 10).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. *Curse.* Things which should bless, become an occasion of falling; to the proud, the things which lift them up; to the gluttonous, their abundance; to the avaricious, their wealth; which, if used to the glory of God, become blessings, do, when self, not God, is their end, by God's dispensation and providence, become a curse to them [*Pusey*]. *I have cursed them*, Lit. it, *i. e.* each blessing. Hence—1. *The minuteness of the curse.* 2. *The gradual operation* of the curse. "Cursed already;" and will continue until you repent. 3. *The insensibility* under the curse. "Ye do not lay to heart." 4. *The severity* of the curse. "Curse *blessings*."

"Whom oils and balsams kill, what salve can cure?"

Ver. 5. *The covenant.* 1. Its blessings. "Life and peace;" *i. e.* of being and well-

being; for all the blessings that make up human welfare, were summed up for the Hebrew in one word—peace [*Cox*]. 2. Its conditions. "Forbear." Jews claimed its privileges, while neglecting its conditions—thought God would bless them, while they were free from obligations to obey him. 3. Its influence. "He *feared*" me, had great reverence, and *was afraid;* had profound and holy terror before me. "He received the fear of God in his whole heart and soul. For these reduplications and emphases suggest to the hearer how rooted in virtue are those thus praised" [*Pusey*]. It is better to fear too much than to presume but a little [*Abp. Abbot*]. "Sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself (venerate his glorious majesty), and let him be your fear (be not dismayed at man), and your dread (lest ye provoke him by distrust)" (Isa. viii. 13).

HOMILETICS.

The True Minister.—*Verses* 6, 7.

The prophet looks backward to the fidelity and zeal of Phinehas, which should have been copied by his successors. But "the lines of character are too large and fair to be those of mortal man. It is *the ideal priest* whom the prophet has in his mind, the archetype to which every true priest will seek to be conformed; not any single member of the priesthood—as indeed he himself intimates by using the tribal name 'Levi' in ver. 4, instead of the personal name, 'Phinehas,' and by employing the abstract term, 'the priest,' in ver. 7" [*Cox*].

I. The true minister is holy in character. He stands in awe of God who has chosen him, and made a covenant of life and peace with him (ver. 5). As "the messenger of the Lord of Hosts," he feels his responsibility, and walks worthy of his high vocation. Spiritual work requires spiritual character as a prime qualification. "None but he who made the world can make a minister of the Gospel," says *Newton.* **II. The true minister is devout in life.** "He walked with God." Consistency harmonizes conduct and creed. Holiness, like the law of gravitation, should regulate every motion of life. Men judge of the minister's practice more than the minister's sermon. The missionary Eliot resolved to leave something of God, heaven, and religion with all that came near him. In character and conduct we must be blameless, "unrebukable;" for, says *Bp. Horne*—"He who undertakes to reprove the world, must be one whom the world cannot reprove." **III. The true minister is incorruptible in doctrine.** "The law of truth was in his mouth." He believes the truth of God, and it is *the law*, the staple of his instructions. No fear, no sinister, selfish principles lead him to keep back or pervert the truth. He conceals nothing, however unpleasant—shuns not to declare the whole counsel of God. "In doctrine showing incorruptness (untainted sincerity), gravity (dignified delivery), sincerity, sound speech (healthy discourse in public and private), that cannot be condemned" (Tit. ii. 7, 8). **IV. The true minister is successful in labours.** "And did turn many away from iniquity." Success in one respect may not be realized. God can bless or withhold. One sows, and another reaps. But if we fail to convert, we may reprove, enlighten, and edify. But God promises success to faithful labour. We must not therefore set the sovereignty in opposition to the faithfulness of God. Aim to "convert the sinner from the error of his way," and your work will not be in vain. Remember, as a motto and encouragement, "They that turn many to righteousness (shall shine) as the stars for ever and ever."

The False Minister.—*Verses* 8, 9.

In the former words we have a pattern priest described, to contrast the baseness and falsehood of those now reproved.

I. The false minister is negligent in duty. "Ye have not kept my ways"

1. *He perverts the truth in teaching.* "Ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi." They violated and defeated the intentions of it, and made it contemptible by false expositions and partiality. "But have been partial in the law." 2. *He departs from the truth in life.* Not merely falls short of it, the best do that, but openly, insolently renounced and reversed it. "Ye are departed out of the way," of knowledge, fear, and truth. "Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law." **II. The false minister is pernicious in example.** "Ye have caused many to stumble at the law." Instead of keeping integrity of character, and shedding light on the path of peace, by doctrine and example, he misleads, casts a stumbling-block in the ways of others, and causes them to fall. Fenelon says, "that moral instructions have no weight nor influence, when they are neither supported by clear principles nor good examples." "The sin of the young men was very great before the Lord; for men abhorred the offering of the Lord." **III. The false minister is cursed in his work.** "I also made you contemptible and base before all people." God is no respecter of persons—if men are—and the lot of the unfaithful minister will be as his service. "According as ye have" acted, so will be your punishment. In spite of office, unholy men will be held in contempt by the mass of the people. Careless and unprincipled clergy will ever sink in public estimation. 1. *They break the covenant of peace.* Therefore forfeit all its blessings. 2. *They deeply disgrace themselves.* These are made *base*, and made base *before all the people.* 3. *They exclude themselves from office.* "I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 6, 7. I. *The priest's character.* (*a*) Intelligent: If he must *keep*, he must *get*, knowledge. (*b*) Consistent; he must walk with God. (*c*) Truthful; and (*d*) holy. "The lips of the righteous feed many." II. *The priest's dignity* not a common calling, but an ambassador of Christ (2 Cor. v. 20). "For he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts." III. *The priest's vocation.* 1. To give instruction. "They should seek the law at his mouth." 2. To be impartial. "Doing nothing by partiality." 3. To restore men to God. "Turn many away from iniquity."

Here is a solemn warning to the Christian clergy. If such was the duty of the Levitical priesthood, and such the penalty for not performing it aright, how much more imperative is the obligation of the Christian priest to "keep knowledge," and to instruct the people in sound doctrine; or, as St. Paul expresses it, "to give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine, to meditate on these things, and give himself wholly to them" (1 Tim. iv. 13, 15); "to speak the things which become sound doctrine" (Tit. ii. 1); "to hold fast the faithful word, so that he may be able by sound doctrine to convince the gainsayers" (Tit. i. 9). And how much sorer will be his punishment if he fails to discharge it! (cf. Tit. i. 7, 9: 2 Tim. ii. 2). It is to be feared that this warning is greatly needed in the present day! [*Words.*].

Ver. 6. He "*walks*" with God in a happy *consent and progress;* for "how can two walk together except they be agreed?" To walk is not only to move, but to move onward. He not only walks with God, but he walks with him "in integrity and peace:" two lines of advance are specially marked out for him—the generous uprightness which saves his teaching from sinister perversions, rules his personal conduct, so that he is drawn aside by no selfish or impure motive; and, moreover, he possesses himself ever more fully of all the blessings which conduce to peace or well-being. Thus, by his own pure and happy life, no less than by his wholesome and unperverted doctrine, he "brings back many from guilt," con-

vincing the sinful of the mistake they have made, and leading them, through repentance, to that way of life and peace in which he himself is advancing [*S. Cox*].

Ver. 8. (cf. Neh. xiii. 29). Prophecy a comment on history.

Ver. 9. Punishment to unfaithful ministers. 1. It is in proportion to their exaltation in office. 2. It is impartial. 3. It is public before all. In partiality and pleasing men, they bring upon themselves contempt: in faithfulness and pleasing God, they gain the testimony of a good conscience and the approval of God.

Unlawful Marriages.—*Verses* 10—12.

Reproof is now administered to the people, especially the priests, for flagrant violation of law in marrying foreigners, and divorcing their wives when married. This was—

I. A violation of God's law. Marriage with the Canaanites and with all idolaters was forbidden (Ex. xxxiv. 16: Deut. vii. 3: 1 Kings xi. 1, 2). The high priest was to take a virgin of his own people (Lev. xxi. 14, 15); and the priests who married strange wives defiled "the covenant of the priesthood" (Neh. xiii. 29). "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." **II. A desecration of the community.** Israel was a *holy* people, but this was an "*abomination* committed in Israel." If they allied themselves with those from whom God had set them apart, they broke the national league, and *profaned* the covenant of their fathers. Hence—1. *They polluted the temple.* The very seat and centre of God's presence. "In Jerusalem." 2. *They polluted the people.* They fell from their lofty dignity, and tainted others by their influence. "Why do we treacherously every man against his brother?" **III. A condition of hopeless calamity.** The imprecation or menace is severe. 1. *Posterity will not escape the punishment.* In whatever sense these words be taken, the master and the scholar, or (as marg.) him that waketh and him that answereth—the camp would be silent. The posterity of him that violated the marriage law would be cut off, and not one left in "the tabernacles of Jacob." 2. *Sacrifice will not atone for the sins.* There will be none to offer a sacrifice for the sinner, or if there were, they could not shield from the penalty. "Insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more."

A Common Fatherhood.—*Verse* 10.

God was the Father, the Creator of Israel in a special sense (Isa. lxiii. 16). But all men have a common relation to God, who is our common Father and Creator. God is looked upon as Judge and Ruler of men, but the Fatherhood of God is forgotten. Hence the evils which afflict society.

I. In the Fatherhood of God we have an argument for personal piety. As dependent creatures, we should acknowledge him. "Hath not one God created us?" We are not simply God's creatures, but his *offspring*, children in paternal likeness (Acts xvii. 28). Hence—1. *A motive to obedience.* As children, we should seek to know and practise God's will. 2. *A protest against idolatry.* Material, intellectual, and spiritual idolatry should be forsaken. Our filial relation should teach us the spirituality of the Godhead, and the folly of atheism. "Be ye, therefore, followers (imitators) of God, as dear children" (Eph. v. 1). **II. In the Fatherhood of God we have a bond of human brotherhood.** He "hath made of one blood all nations of men." In the common origin we have the unity of the human race—a natural tie to cement them together in their migrations and settlements. But nations have broken asunder, set up divinities, and forgotten God's purpose in organizing them. Science and philosophy, treaties and commerce, have failed to unite them again. Wars, selfishness, and lusts still prevail. Only when men are taught that a Father in heaven rules their interests, and settles their rights and

wrongs, will they cease to hate. "O foolish people and unwise, is he not thy Father that hath bought thee?—hath he not made thee and established thee?" **III. In the Fatherhood of God we have a motive to philanthropy.** In our creation we have a natural, in Christ a spiritual, relation to God; every offence is a violation of these relationships to God, and an injury to our fellow-men. Sin against the brethren is sin against Christ (1 Cor. viii. 12). "Why deal treacherously every man against his brother?" Social sins are treachery against the community, violations of faith and confidence. "Did not he that made me in the womb make him?—and did not one fashion us in the womb?" "Love one another."

UNHOLY MARRIAGES.—*Verse* 11.

The Jews commanded to keep themselves separated from nations around them—to maintain their position as custodians of revelations, and abiding witnesses of God's existence. But they often disobeyed, and formed idolatrous connections. Thus, the holiness of Jehovah was profaned, and Judah became an abomination. Nehemiah and Ezra sought to remove the evil which Malachi condemns.

I. This evil may now be committed literally. Strange gods are worshipped in every community. Names and shapes of idols have changed, but in essential characters remain the same. Every woman not truly devoted to Jehovah is "a daughter of a strange god," under the influence of the god of this world. Christian men, for the sake of sensual and worldly considerations, sometimes marry such. 1. They marry women who sacrifice their noblest feelings for wealth. 2. Women who have bound themselves upon the altar of fashion. 3. Women who sacrifice their holiest impulses for pleasure. 4. Women who are devoted to the triumphs of ambition. Christians should never violate their union with Jehovah to unite themselves with idolaters. This, under even the most plausible circumstances, is—(1) to disobey a Divine command; (2) to lose the Divine blesssing; (3) to incur the Divine displeasure. **II. This evil may be committed spiritually.** Union to God often represented in Scripture as marriage—the closest of bonds. God has right to our devotion, service, and love. From this celestial marriage spring all virtues and graces. But the worship of strange gods has been most prolific in pernicious customs, degrading vices, and dangerous errors. These evils abound, captivate, and allure, as heathen women did the Jews. Men marry the daughters of a strange god spiritually: 1. When they join themselves with popular customs which have emanated from the spirit of idolatry. 2. When they embrace false and erroneous systems of religion. 3. When they associate themselves freely with unholy religionists. God requires his people to separate themselves from all fascinating forms of evil, and to be wholly his. He has no agreement with idols, nor must his people with evils arising out of idolatry. All unholy unions are breaches of a marriage covenant—a voluntary preference of evil to God. **III. This evil, whether committed literally or spiritually, will produce disastrous results.** 1. *Literally.* It results in—(1) domestic unhappiness; (2) a divided household; (3) ill-trained children—probably generations of evil-doers; (4) neglect of true religion on the part of both. "If David marry Maacah," says Adams, "their issue proves an Absalom. If Solomon love idolatrous women, here is enough to overthrow him, with all his wisdom; by joining his heart to theirs, he shall disjoin it from God. One religion matching with another not seldom breeds an atheist—*one of no religion at all.*" 2. *Spiritually.* It results in—(1) blindness in spiritual things; (2) loss of Divine favour; (3) wandering in deceptive errors; (4) loss of religious influence; (5) being given up by God. "Ephraim is joined to idols; *let him alone.*" Learn to guard against uniting with anything which separates us from God. An evil association has often been a devil's chain, binding the soul to everlasting wretchedness (*The Study and The Pulpit*).

Unlawful Divorce.—*Verses* 13—16.

"This have ye done again;" a second accusation is brought against them. To marry strange women, they divorced their lawful wives, drove them in tears to the sanctuary, and brought contempt upon their worship. Men add one sin to another, until the wrath of God is poured out upon them.

I. Divorce shamefully cruel. They afflicted their own wives so cruelly that they fled to the altar, and covered it "with weeping and loud cries." Those who are wronged and insulted may obtain redress before God's throne. He hears the cries of the helpless. The tears of the innocent rise above the incense and worship of their persecutors. **II. Divorce strangely aggravating.** The offence was committed against constant warning, was most aggravating in its nature and results. 1. *They broke the tenderest ties of humanity.* "The wife of thy *youth*," who plighted her troth to thee in the freshness of life. "*Thy companion*," sharing thy joys and sorrows, hopes and interests, thy associate and help-meet in all the circumstances of life. Above all, "the wife of *thy covenant*," given and taken with most solemn pledges, yet now cast away in scorn and lust! Even the heathen believed marriage to be a sacred act, and guarded it by solemn sanctions: what, then, must be the guilt of divorce under such circumstances! 2. *They defied the witness of God.* "The Lord hath been witness" to the solemn engagement between them. To him the appeal was made. To violate this covenant is to deal treacherously, and God will avenge the transgressors. "Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God." **III. Divorce boldly defended.** Some take ver. 15 as alluding to the example of Abraham, who sinned against Sarah the wife of his youth, by taking Hagar. This seemed to sanction their sin, and the prophet meets the objection or defence, "What did that one?" God promised Abraham seed, a child who should be the hope of the chosen people, and the blessing of the world. He mistakenly followed the counsel of his wife, instead of the counsel of God, and sought that seed by marrying the Egyptian. But you have not the promise of Abraham, nor are you actuated by the same motives. If you were *pure* in motive, you are sinful in act; for God hates divorce, and acts of cruelty which you commit. "Therefore, take heed to your spirit;" have no light thought of this offence; for you cannot excuse yourselves by the errors of great men. **IV. Divorce which frustrated the design of lawful marriage.** Others take ver. 15 as referring to the first pair, between whom and between all others born after them, God willed that there should be one indivisible union. This law should not therefore be broken. But "*wherefore one?*" That he might see a godly seed. From lawful marriage, religious offspring may be secured by God's blessing. Divorce and polygamy counteract the interests of piety, and have even been unfavourable to the education and godly training of children. **V. Divorce which ended in serious consequences.** The unity of marriage faithfully kept is in harmony with God's will, but violated is pernicious to society. 1. *It is treachery to society.* "Deal not treacherously" (ver. 16). 2. *It is insulting to God.* "The Lord God of Israel saith, that he hateth putting away." God permitted Israel, on account of hardness of heart, to divorce (Matt. xix. 8: Mark x. 5). But the legislation of Moses was in advance of the common morality of the time, and taught that marriage was not "a mere natural tie and temporary alliance," but a solemn covenant to be dissolved only in cases of adultery (1 Cor. vii. 15) and flagrant infidelity, and by a legal bill given into the hands of the offender (Deut. xxiv. 1). 3. *It is detrimental to Christian worship.* "Insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more" (ver. 13). God rejects the gift when the heart of the giver is wrong. He does not "receive it with good will" at his hand. Family discords and family quarrels hinder worship, and prevent access to God. Let parents and children take heed, and dwell in peace, "that your prayers be not hindered."

PRACTICAL INFIDELITY.—*Verse* 17.

The prophet's words are directed against the spirit of discontent and murmuring which prevailed among the people, who lost faith in all the promises of God, because the expected manifestation of the glory of the Lord for the good of his people did not take place at once, and in their despair called even the holiness and justice of God in question, and began to deny the coming of the Lord to judge the world [*Keil*].

I. They had perverted views of God's character. Men, impatient under affliction, murmur. Because God prospers the wicked, and does not help them, they think that he approves of sin, and delights in the sinner. "Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them." **II. They had perverted views of God's providence.** God had no concern for men at all, or, if he had, he was not just and impartial. "Where is the God of judgment?" Men carve out a providence of their own reason, as they would like things to be. They do not *see* Divine justice: sentence is not executed upon wicked men, therefore they say God will not punish. They see the prosperity of the wicked, and conclude that God delights in them. First, men quarrel with God's dispensations, and then deny his providence. Thus are they proud under the rod, and tempted to atheism. When they cherish this evil disposition, and break out into blasphemous expressions, God is offended, and will make them feel that he is of purer eyes than to behold sin, and cannot endure to look upon it with pleasure (cf. Hab. i. 13: Ps. v. 4). "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 11. *Scandalous sin in the Church.* 1. Belies Christian profession. 2. Violates sacred obligation. 3. Profanes distinguished privileges.

Ver. 12. *Master and scholar.* Unfit for their place, sent out of the school, and Divinely punished. "The Lord cuts off," and sends them "out of the tabernacles of Jacob," where he deals impartially with sin, and without respect of persons with men.

Vers. 14, 15. *The sanctity of marriage.* 1. Undertaken in solemn covenant. Both parties mutually bound to love and help each other. So sacred the obligation, that it is termed "the covenant of God" (Prov. i. 7). 2. Witnessed by a Holy God. If undertaken in his fear, the knot is tied by his hand. "What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

"Speak it not lightly! Oh! beware, beware;
'Tis no vain promise, no unmeaning word;
Lo! men and angels list the faith ye swear,
And by the High and Holy One 'tis heard.
O, then, kneel humbly at his altar now,
And pray for strength to keep the marriage vow." [*Anon.*]

Ver. 16. *Garment.* Violence, like an outer garment, as in Ps. lxxiii. 6. A garment hiding sin, and exposing to shame and punishment. The livery of the devil—opposed (1) to the garment of the meek, by which the godly cover themselves (Eph. iv. 24: Col. iii. 10); (2) to the white robes of the redeemed saints in heaven (Rev. vii. 14). "The figurative expression may be explained from the idea that the dress reflects the inward part of a man, and therefore a soiled garment is a symbol of uncleanness of heart" (cf. Zech. iii. 4: Isa. lxiv. 5: Rev. iii. 4) [*Keil*].

"The soul of this man is in his clothes" [*Shaks.*].
"The apparel oft proclaims the man" [*Shaks.*].

Ver. 17. *Wearying God.* Spoken after the manner of men. God is said to be *tired*, fatigued—1. With their formal worship. 2. With their blasphemous words; and 3. with the justification of themselves in sin. God is infinitely patient with our infirmities and prayers, but wearied with our sins and impenitent hearts. "Thou hast made me to *serve* (*burdened*, overcome by labour) with thy sins, thou hast *wearied* (disgusted) me with thine iniquities" (Is. xliii. 23, 24).

ILUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1—4. *Curse blessings.* Those who despise the upper springs of grace, shall find the nether springs of worldly comfort prove their poison. To the rejecters of Christ even those things which are calculated to work their spiritual and eternal good become occasions for yet greater sin. Wretched are those men who not only have a curse upon their common blessings, but also on their spiritual opportunities [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 5. *Fear.* "All fear but fear of heaven betrays guilt, and guilt is villany" [*Dr. Lee*].

Vers. 6—9. It really is fine to observe with what native ease Malachi rises into the higher region of thought. While dwelling on the sins of the priests he moves in the lower, the ceremonial elements; he insists on the maimed rites and blemished sacrifices, on the perfunctory and the contemptuous spirit with which they lounged through the service of the Temple. But no sooner does he attempt to frame a conception of what the true priest should be, than all *that* is forgotten; we hear no more of altar and sacrifice: his thoughts are riveted on the moral aspects of the priestly vocation—how holy a man, how wise a teacher, how careful and friendly a guide, the priest should be. When we are thinking only to hear that the sons of Levi are to offer clean and perfect, instead of blemished and polluted, sacrifices, to delight in the ministrations of the sanctuary instead of despising them, as much to our surprise as pleasure, he places before us a lofty spiritual ideal of character and service, well-nigh, if not altogether, beyond the reach of mortal powers: he pronounces a eulogium on Levi which we should hardly dare to inscribe, as an epitaph, on the tomb of the holiest saint, or even on that of an inspired apostle [*S. Cox*].

Ver. 10. *Father.* Man is thy brother, and thy father is God [*Lamartine*]. The universe is but one great city, full of beloved ones, Divine and human, by nature endeared to each other [*Seneca*].

Ver. 12. *Master.* To a single teacher, the hope of an entire city is often entrusted [*Scriver*]. *Scholar.* The greatest scholars are not the wisest men [*Regnier*]. Men must be taught, as though you taught them not [*Pope*].

Vers. 13—16. *Marriages* are styled matches, yet amongst those many that are married, how few there are that are matched! Husbands and wives are like locks and keys, that rather break than open, except the wards be answerable [*W. Secker*].

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.] **Messenger**] The prophet, in first instance; applied to the Baptist (Matt. xi. 10: Luke vii. 27). **Prepare**] Clear away, like a pioneer before an Eastern prince. **Suddenly**] Unexpectedly. 2.] Judgment will begin at the coming of the Lord. **Who**] *i. e.* no one can endure it (cf. Joel ii. 11). **Abide** and **stand**] As opposed to falling under judgments. The double figure has one meaning. The smelter's fire burns corrupt ingredients of metals (cf. Zech. xiii. 9); the lye or alkaline salt cleanses the dirt out of clothes (cf. Isa. iv. 4). 3.] As smelter the Lord **sits**], tempering the fire and keenly watching the process. **Levi's**] sons, the objects of the trial, to be purified. When priests morally cleansed, offer sacrifices in righteousness. 4.] The whole nation will be pleasant to God as in old time. 5. I] whom ye challenged (ch. ii. 17) will be a judge and eye-witness against sins named. 6. I Jehovah] am unchangeable in gifts and calling, therefore **sons of Jacob**] (contrasted with Jehovah) will not be destroyed. "The Divine immutability secured the preservation of the Jewish people from destruction, notwithstanding their flagrant wickedness, till he had accomplished all his purposes of mercy" [*Henderson*]. 7.] Reproof for non-payment of tithes, which was the cause of national calamities. **Wherein**] In what respect return? indicates a

self-righteous spirit. **8.**] They did what none should dare to do. **Rob**] Defraud God. **Tithes** had been withheld, though they were severely punished. **9.**] Ch. ii. 2. **10—12.**] Nature of curse. **10. All**] Not a portion, and thus defraud God. **Storehouse**] Treasuries (Neh. xiii. 12). **Prove**] if I am not holy and righteous, an attitude which they had questioned. **Then shall promised blessings** flow like pouring rain. **Pour**] Lit. empty out (2 Kings vii. 2). **Enough**] Lit. till there is no more need; *i. e.* superabundance [*Keil*]. Where sufficiency can have no more place; more than sufficient; superabundantly [*Henderson*]. **11**]. The thought individualized. **Devourer**] Locusts and other noxious creatures. **Rebuke**] Practically; *i. e.* to frustrate the intention. Nothing shall then miscarry. **12. Blessed**] In consequence of God's blessing. **Delight.**] An object of pleasure to every one (Zech. viii. 13: Deut. xxxiii. 29). **13—18.**] Impatient murmuring is most unreasonable; the day is coming which will bring to light the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. **13. Stout**] (bold) sig. to bind fast, make firm, and in a bad sense to be *hard* or obstinate, such as that in Jude 15. [*Henderson*]. Keil gives, to do violence to one, to overpower him (cf. Ex. xii. 33: 2 Sam. xxiv. 4). Specimen words are given. **14.**] God has no regard to well doing, therefore there is no advantage in serving him (cf. ch. ii. 17). **His ordinance**] Lit. what he requires to be observed, prescribed rites. **Mourn.**] In black or mournful garb, as a sign of penitence. Voluntary fasting is brought into prominence. **15.**] Because God does not reward their works with prosperity, they call **proud**] sinners happy men, favourites of God when blessed (cf. Ps. lxxiii. 12). The wicked are set] Lit. built up, *i. e.* flourish (cf. Jer. xii. 16, 17: Ex. i. 21), and though they have tempted God, are delivered. **16. Then**] When the wicked were openly talking one with another; so the godly held mutual intercourse, and defended the providence of God. Jehovah noticed their conversations, and wrote them in a book]. A custom borrowed from a Persian king, recording the names and merits of any who deserved well, that they might be rewarded (cf. Esther vi. 1, 2). God keeps a book also (cf. Ps. lvi. 9: Dan. vii. 10). **Before**] To lie open before him, and remind him of righteous deeds. **17. Jewels**] Lit. private, peculiar property, "expressing the highest estimation of God's people and their perfect security in the day of judgment." **Spare**] (Ps. ciii. 17, 18) Contrasted with punishment. **18. Return**] to a better mind. **Discern**] the falseness of your calumny against God's dealings (cf. Ex. xi. 7). The day of judgment will change many opinions concerning God's ways and God's people.

HOMILETICS.

The Coming of the Lord.— *Verses* 1—5.

These words are an answer to the sceptical question of the people—"Where is the God of judgment? If there be a God, why does he permit good to be overcome of evil? Why does he delay his coming to rectify things which seem wrong, to make life plainer, and his people easier?" The prophet replies, He will come; I am his messenger; be warned by me, lest you be caught unprepared.

I. **The coming of the Lord is a certain event.** "He shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts." Do not judge of this event by what you see. Remember the prediction, which can never be falsified by the unbelief and contempt of man, or by the events of nature. II. **The coming of the Lord will be an unexpected event.** "The Lord shall come suddenly." He may come when men are not prepared for him, when they do not anticipate the appearance of the Judge of all the earth. "This suddenness is repeated in all the acts and judgments of the Lord. The Lord of glory always comes as a thief in the night to those who sleep in their sins" [*Schmieder*]. Therefore "be ye also ready." III. **The coming of the Lord will be a solemn event.** "Who may abide the day of his coming?" It will be very different from that which carnal Jews expected. He comes not to flatter national pride, nor gratify personal wishes, but to subject their principles and actions to a severe trial. He was to test them by fire. 1. *A day of magnificence to the temple.* He will come "to *his* temple," to beautify and adorn it by his glory, to purify it for his worship by judicial expulsion of all who profane it (Matt. xxi. 12, 13). 2. *A day of solemnity to the world.* "Who shall stand when he appeareth?" (*a*) *He will judge the wicked* (ver. 5). (*b*) *He will purify the godly* (ver. 4). To some the day will be a revelation of wrath, to others a manifestation of grace, to all a solemn trial. Hence question not God's justice, murmur not at his delay, but prepare for the decisive day. "The day of the Lord is great and very terrible, and who can abide it?" IV. **The coming of the Lord is an event of**

which men are warned. "Behold, I will send my messenger." Lest men should be unprepared, warning is given, messenger after messenger is sent to prepare the way. The moral condition of men is not what God desires. In the ministers of the gospel God urges to repentance, helps to remove hindrances and to prepare for the presence of Christ. "To make ready a *prepared* people (supplied like an army with all necessaries) for the Lord" (Luke i. 17).

THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT.—*Verse* 1.

Observe the character under which the Messiah is here presented to our notice. He is described in three ways. First, by his *person:* "The Lord." The word signifies authority and dominion. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, "Ruler in Israel," and "Governor among the nations." Though all power is given to him as Mediator, yet he had a previous claim to dominion before his obedience and death. Secondly, he is described by his *office:* "The Messenger of the covenant." The covenant of grace, "ordered in all things and sure," to which David fled for refuge and solace, and in which he found all his salvation and desire. He is the "Mediator," the "Surety," and the "Messenger" of the covenant, because he not only procures and possesses its blessings, but bestows them. He announces and makes them known, prefaces all invitations and disclosures with a declaration of his commission from the Father. This inferior title does not detract from his glory as "the Lord," but displays it, magnifies it, because it shows infinite condescension and grace. Thirdly, he is described *by the estimation in which he was holden:* "Whom ye delight in." Carnal Jews, mistaken, viewed him as a temporal prince, did "seek" him, and "delighted" in him. It applies, in a nobler sense, to spiritual Jews. He was desired and delighted in by all the people of God from the beginning. To seek and delight in him will always characterize the redeemed —those who believe in him; for "to them that believe he is precious." All that is desirable, all that is delightful to us we find in him. He is our "sun" in darkness, our "shield" in danger, our "physician" in sickness, our "righteousness," our "bread," the "water of life," and "all in all." Let the hearts of them rejoice, therefore, that seek the Lord [*W. Jay*].

THE REFINER AND THE CRUCIBLE.—*Verses* 2, 3.

I. The severity of the trial. II. The agency by which the trial is wrought. "He," that is, the Lord, is "like a refiner's fire." He alone *appoints* it; he alone *effects* it. He is *present* all through the operation. III. The utility of the trial. 1. It is a sign of *preciousness.* We never prune the bramble, nor try the worthless. 2. It is a test of *genuineness.* 3. It is a medium of *purification.* 4. It is a *preparation for service* [*C. Stanford*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. This word "*Behold*" signifieth that this coming of Christ in the flesh should be—1. New, admirable, and stupendous. 2. Sure and certain. 3. Desirable and joyful. 4. Famous and renowned [*Trapp*].

Ver. 2. *Who may abide the day?* There is something awful even in reference to Christ's coming in the flesh. First, *in the occasional emanations and displays of his majesty.* Herod "was troubled, and all Judæa with him. With a whip only he rushed into the temple and drove out the money-changers. On the mount of transfiguration, in the garden, at death, and in his resurrection were displays of majesty. Secondly, it may be exemplified *in his detection of character.* All through his ministry his eyes were a flame of fire. He silenced those who ensnared him, knew all men, and needed not that any

should testify of man. Thirdly, it may be exemplified *in the calamities which were to follow the rejection of him.* They said, "His blood be upon us," and it fell upon them, and rests upon them now. But their unspeakable sufferings were only emblems of those more dreadful punishments to which they are exposed "who have trodden under foot the Son of God," &c. For there is another coming and appearance of Christ. Only those who have a better righteousness than their own can stand [*W. Jay*].

Vers. 3, 4. The refining process. 1. *The objects of it.* "The sons of Levi." The purest Church and the holiest saints need refining. Gold, the thing valued most, is tried or proved by fire; but God's people are more precious than gold. 2. *The method of it.* "He sits" tempering the fire, and making it just the right heat, neither too hot nor too cold, keeping the metal in the fire the exact time, for none of heaven's pure ore will be destroyed. What tenderness, care, and anxiety. 3. *The design of it.* To "purify," that they may offer an offering in righteousness. Right service springs from purified men. There may be gilt, but not gold. Hence "the fining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts."

Ver. 5. 1. *Monstrous evils in their source.* They "fear not me." 2. *Monstrous evils in their detection.* "I will be a swift witness against" them in providence and the ministry of the gospel. 3. *Monstrous evils in their results.* "I will come near to you," though you cry, Where is the God of justice? &c.

HOMILETICS.

The Unchanging God.—*Verse* 6.

God judges the wicked and purifies the righteous to carry out his immutable purpose of love. He changes not, therefore the sons of Israel do not perish.

I. God is unchangeable, therefore his character should not be maligned. "I Jehovah, I change not." Sin may triumph, judgments appear long, but we must never infer from this that God has changed. God is the same in essence and act as ever. He is not less wise and mighty, just and true, than at the beginning. Whatever be the character of his dispensation, he is the eternal and immutable One, "with whom is no variableness (vicissitudes, eclipses, and decreases, like planets), nor shadow (adumbrations, like stars in different sites and positions) of turning" (James i. 17). **II. God is unchangeable, therefore his covenant abides.** Man's word is recalled, altered, or forgotten. Man's conduct is fickle, self-willed, and sinful. But "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" God's covenant with Israel is "equipped and sure" (2 Sam. xxiii. 5). The ingratitude and unfaithfulness of man can never annul it. Nothing can be reversed. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (*i. e.* immutable and unalterable) (Rom. ii. 29). **III. God is unchangeable, therefore his people are not consumed.** "Ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." We are fretful and impatient with one another, despair of amendment and love; but God waits patiently, never casts off entirely, and abides by his word of promise. We provoke him to anger, but he remembers his covenant. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."

Divine Blessings Suspended.—*Verses* 7—12.

In these words God explains why his blessings have been withheld, reproves the people for keeping back tithes and offerings, and promises abundant blessings on condition of repentance.

I. Why are Divine blessings withheld? The reason is not found in God, but

in the people. God is not unwilling to bless, nor slack concerning his promise, but they do not fulfil the conditions. 1. *They have rebelled against God.* "Ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them" (ver. 7). Their sins were of long continuance, imitated by posterity, and defended with pertinacity. 2. *They have robbed God.* They defrauded God in a twofold sense. The priests did not discharge their sacrificial duties rightly, and the Levites could not officiate for God, because driven away in destitution. How, therefore, can God bless them in their apostasy? The reward of obedience cannot be given to the disobedient. **II. On what conditions will Divine blessings be given?** They are called upon to prove God, to test him, by complying with his wish (ver. 10). 1. *Return to God.* "Return unto me, and I will return unto you" (ver. 7). If they return in penitence, he will return in blessings. Distance from God will hinder the fulfilment of every promise. 2. *Pay God his dues.* "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse" (ver. 10). No wonder men do not morally conform to the Divine will when they neglect the smaller duty of sacrifice. *All*, not a part of the tithes must be given. Nothing must be kept back, for God has a right to the firstfruits and the best of everything. Then, if these conditions are complied with, the curse will be removed, blessings like fruitful showers will fall upon them. 1. *The temple* will be blessed. The *treasury* will be filled. There will be *meat*, not superfluity, for those who minister in *my house*. 2. *The land* will be blessed. The devouring locusts will be rebuked, the fruits of earth shall not be destroyed, and the grapes of the vintage shall not miscarry. "Ye shall be a delightsome land." 3. *The people* will be blessed. "All nations shall call you blessed" (ver. 12). If we honour God with our substance and free-will offerings, we shall not lose in this world. The windows of heaven will open, and no real good will be withheld. So happy will be our condition, so fertile our farms and lands, that all men will call us blessed. "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

ROBBING GOD.—*Verse* 8.

When exhorted to return, they reply in a spirit of pride and self-righteousness. Return to God! In what? Have we, the chosen race, the holy people, departed from God? Yes, replies the prophet, in those very things in which you profess to be exact. You do not duly pay tithes and offerings, though rebuked by the famine for neglect. You defraud God, therefore, of his dues. This is a common sin in Christian worship and daily life.

I. **Men rob God of worship.** Man is made to worship. God alone is the proper object of worship. To him we owe reverence, homage, and praise. But to withhold these or transfer them to the creature is to rob God. II. **Men rob God of time.** Our times are in his hands. But time is not valued nor turned to good account. The *Sabbath*, expressly claimed for God, is neglected. *Youth*, "the morning of life, and maturity of age are given to pleasure." "Redeem the time." "Time wasted is existence, used is life" [*Young*]. III. **Men rob God of talents.** All gifts are bestowed by God, should be improved and consecrated to him. But to devote them to sinful conversation and unlawful pursuits is to rob God. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 7. 1. *The charge of defection.* Gone away and not kept the ordinances of God. (1) *Defection of long standing.* "From the days of your fathers." Posterity walking in the steps of their fathers, and thus entailing a curse upon

generation after generation. (2) *Defection of stubborn spirit.* "Wherein shall we return?" In wilful ignorance and prejudice, in frivolous excuses and self-righteousness, they challenge the charge and demand particulars. 2. *The invitation to return.* "Return unto me," &c. (1) This invitation *displays the great mercy of God.* After such long and grievous apostasy he offers to be reconciled. (2) This invitation *aggravates the impenitent conduct of men.* No excuse can be made. "I will return unto you."

Ver. 8. *Rob God!* How *base;* what *presumption,* and what *folly!* "In *what?* God specifies two things only, obvious, patent, which, as being material things, they could not deny. In *tithes and offerings*" [*Pusey*]. A striking instance found in Neh. xiii. 10.

Ver. 10. *Prove me.* 1. Prove God concerning his promise of mercy to the penitent sinner and the troubled Christian. 2. Prove God concerning the blessings promised to his house. 3. Prove God concerning his predictions of good to his Church. In these and in other ways God shows marvellous love and condescension, and pledges himself in a way in which he can verify his word. "Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok answered him, and said, Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the Lord hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store (2 Chron. xxxi. 10).

Vers. 10—12. How much depends upon giving ourselves an offering wholly unto the Lord! The offerings now required are our hearts, and all that comes from them. But if the Lord was so strict in tithes, how much more with our hearts! Dost thou wish the full blessing of God? then be exact in whatever is thy duty. What is our duty? Whatever God requires of us, in great or little, in his service or in every-day life. How can he who is not strict in duty hope or pray for the full blessing of God? [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

HARD SAYINGS AGAINST GOD.—*Verses* 13—15.

The people still murmur against God, and openly declare that there is no profit in serving him, because the righteous have no advantage over the wicked. But this murmuring is unjust, and the coming judgment will make a distinction between those who fear God and those who fear him not. Some of their hard words are given. The *common sentiment* of the time was that piety brings no reward, and *the religious error* of the time that observance of outward forms was the service which God should bless.

I. **God's service is falsified.** "It is vain to serve God." 1. This *sentiment springs from a wrong estimation of God's service.* It is not a *mercenary* service. The Jews waited not upon God in love, but in hope of being well paid. Religion is not a bargain, but affection, obedience, and gratitude to God. It is not a *mournful* but a delightful service. "What profit that we have walked mournfully," in black and in grief? Fasting, prescribed or voluntary, was considered meritorious, had claims upon God, and when left unrewarded, they complained against God. "Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?" 2. *This sentiment is denied by Scripture.* Paul seems to give some truth to it when he says, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." But from the same person we learn that "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." God himself told the Jews that the meanest act for him would not be left without reward (ch. i. 10). In every sense, "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are paths of peace." "Riches and honour are with me; my fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver." 3. *This sentiment is*

contradicted by Christian experience. God's people have found God's service their highest happiness and joy. They have *tasted* that the Lord is good, and that the man who trusts in him is blessed. Whatever be their outward condition, their spiritual experience gives the lie to such an impudent statement concerning God's service. "Blessed are they that do his commandments." **II. God's justice is impugned.** Because they met with no reward for their services; because the wicked seemed to prosper rather than the righteous; they openly declared that God's favourites were proud and ungodly men. The wicked *have* put God to the test, they reply, calling down vengeance from heaven; but they are *built up*, and flourish, and though they have *tempted God* by breaking his laws, yet they are delivered from misfortune. Hence they gave wrong verdicts, and set at nought the decrees of God. "We call the proud happy." We should not cavil against God's dealings for many reasons. 1. *We cannot read the heart.* How do we know who are happy, and who are not happy. Men most prosperous outwardly may be most miserable inwardly. Beneath the splendid show may be "the worm, the canker, and the grief." And men most afflicted may be most happy. The glare of prosperity should not blind our judgment. "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth." 2. *We forget the future.* For a time the proud may be happy, but their happiness is shortlived, "only for a season," and does not satisfy. The wicked may be set up, but they build on a wrong foundation, and great may be their fall. Those who tempt and defy God, may be delivered for the present; but God is often most angry with men when he seems best pleased; sweeps them away when their inward thought is to continue for ever. On earth what a curse, and how uncertain their prosperity! But at the great day, how sudden, complete, and terrible their overthrow! Headlong their fall, without escape, and without hope. "How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors."

Divine Recognition of Christian Fellowship.—*Verses* 16—18.

The prophet now contrasts the faithful few with the sceptical many. While the ungodly were uttering hard sayings, those who feared God held mutual intercourse, defended God's dealings, and encouraged one another to love and trust him. A remnant has always been found in the darkest days, whom God has noticed and blessed.

I. The practice they adopted. In character and conduct they stand out in remarkable contrast. 1. *They were secretly pious.* They "*thought* upon his name." The wicked do not think upon God; or if they do, their thoughts concerning him are sinful and vain. The righteous, in contrast, esteem and ever seek to honour the name of God. They meditate upon his perfections, works, and words, and their meditation is sweet. 2. *They were personally sincere.* They "*feared* the Lord," not in slavish terror, but with awe and filial reverence. They were loyal and true in their profession. The root of the matter was in them. Fear was the secret spring, the hidden power of holy life. 3. *They openly encouraged one another.* So powerful was their piety, that it was revealed in their speech. (*a*) They spoke *openly* "one to another," without fear or shame. (*b*) They spoke *often*, to encourage and strengthen one another. Amid the atheism and ungodliness of the times, they mutually talked not about the politics of the nation, but of personal religion and the God they feared. **II. The distinction they gained.** Those who disregarded God would ridicule his people. But here is a caution to the wicked, and an encouragement to the godly. 1. *God heard their conversation.* "The Lord hearkened and heard it." God was thought to be forgetful, or an idle spectator of events. But not a sigh nor a prayer, not a loyal word nor a feeble meeting, escape his notice. 2. *God remembered their works.* As earthly monarchs record the

deeds and remember the names of their servants, so the King of Heaven keeps a record of his people. The meanest service will not be forgotten. "Write this a memorial in a book." 3. *God spared them on earth.* "I will *spare* them," in contrast with the doom of the wicked: "as a man spareth *his own son*," in tender compassion (Ps. ciii. 17, 18). All of mercy, nothing from merit. 4. *God will reward them at judgment.* In the coming day men will "return" to a right mind, and confess the justice of God. (*a*) They shall be *separated from the wicked.* "Discern between the righteous and the wicked." This not always possible on earth, will be easy at the great day. (*b*) They will be *claimed as peculiar treasure.* "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." They are precious to God, and will be owned and honoured by him. There is a solemn, an eternal distinction between those who serve God and those who serve him not. The reward of God's servants is the greatest, the highest distinction we can attain. What are all the distinctions of the world to refuge on earth and blessedness in heaven? Follow the example that you may share the honour and happiness of the saints. "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous: verily, he is a God that judgeth in the earth."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 14. *Vain.* They themselves are vain and most vain, for two reasons, and in two respects. *First,* they take themselves to be servers of God. *Secondly,* they stick in the bark, serve him with the outside only, honour him with the lips, and not with their hearts; they bring vain oblations, empty performances, serve him with formalities which he rejects with scorn as he did the Pharisees' devotions (Luke xvi. 15) [*Trapp*].

Ver. 15. *Proud, happy.* A sentiment —1. At variance with the truth of God. "Thou hast rebuked the proud, who are *cursed*" (Ps. cxix. 21). 2. Displaying ignorance. How do *we* know that the proud are happy? Can *we* read their hearts? (Prov. xxi. 24). 3. Indicative of pride. They boast of their superior intelligence. "*We call.*" "Pride is increased by ignorance; those assume the most who know the least" [*Gay*].

Ver. 16. *The Divine jewels. My jewels.* It is a strong expression of *value.* Much in this world even on which God sets high value, though much that he condemns. Something which he distinguishes from all that sparkles and glitters with material lustre—from things which earthly and carnal men have most coveted and idolized. These jewels are *scattered* here and there, among earthly things; not in a collected state, except in God's view. By him they are seen as one sacred company and fraternity. Unequal in degrees of purity and lustre, accounted the dross and offscouring of society; but *He* to whom they belong sees them in a different light; a beam of his radiant light falls on each, and all will see them at last. There will be a *collecting,* an *assembling of them together.* The grand act of righteous separation *must* bring the saints together, that the *effect* of redemption may be conspicuously displayed. Think of that stupendous knowledge and power which will secure that none of them shall be missing, or will be lost! *Not one* lost in the vastness of the scene; *not one* that was even in the utmost obscurity in mortal life; *not one* in the remotest corner of the earth, or island of the sea. When each sees all, each may wonder at the vigilance, the affectionate care, and the mighty power that will have brought them all together, after preserving them all separately, in infinite variety of circumstances and so many ages. Then, when the jewels are "*made up,*" he will pronounce, "*they are mine.*" What triumph to hear it! What congratulation with one another! And what a situation that must be—in place and circumstances, felicity and glory—in which he will assign their abode within the immediate manifestation of his presence! Looking at this prospect, which of us can be content that

his soul should be wanting when "the Lord of Hosts" shall "make up his jewels!" Who can bear the thought of being cast among the baser rejected things of creation, and for him to say, "That is *not mine;* take it away!" [*J. Foster*].

Ver. 17. *Spare them.* If a man spares any one, it will surely be his own son. The very relation pleads for him. He spares them as to *exemption.* He spares them as to *correction.* They are afflicted, but have alleviations. He spares them as to *exertion.* He considers their strength, and will not require of some what he ordains for others. He spares them as to *acceptance.* Their best actions are imperfect. Their obedience needs pardon. He views all through Christ. *He spared not him,* that *he might spare you.* Never forget the kindness of God, and spare not yourselves in his cause [*Jay*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Vers. 1—5. *Come.* The last day will assign to every one a station suitable to his character; ranks will then be adjusted, and precedency set right; then virtue will be rewarded and vice punished [*Wilson*]. A due consideration of this important subject is calculated to rouse our minds, and to set on work those two grand engines and mighty springs of activity—viz., hope and fear [*Ib.*].

Ver. 3. *Refiner.* A few ladies once met in Dublin to read the Scriptures and converse together. One lady said that the fuller's soap and the refiner of silver were only the same image intended to convey the same view of the sanctifying influences of the grace of Christ. "No," said another, "they are not just the same image; there is something remarkable in the expression in this verse: 'he shall *sit,*'" &c. All thought it possibly might be so. This lady was to call upon a silversmith, and report to them what he said on the subject. She went, without telling the object of her visit, and begged to know the process of refining, which he fully described to her. "But do you sit while you are refining?" asked she. "O yes, madam; I must sit with my eyes steadily fixed on the furnace, since if the silver remain too long it is sure to be injured," said he. "And how do you know when it is sufficiently refined?" "Whenever I see my own image reflected in it, I know the process is completed." She at once saw the beauty and comfort of the expression [*Whitecross*].

Ver. 6. *Change not.* In commercial crises manhood is at a greater discount than funds are. Suppose a man had said to me last spring, "If there comes a pinch in your affairs, draw upon me for ten thousand dollars." The man said so last spring, but I should not dare to draw on him this fall. I should say, "Times have changed; he would not abide by it." But God's promises are "from everlasting to everlasting," and he always stands up to them. There never was a run on heaven that was not promptly met [*Beecher*].

Ver. 8. *Rob.* Special favours call for special gratitude and service, as those who rent the largest farms generally pay the most for them [*Wilson*]. *In tithes.* Well may we think our substance due where we owe ourselves [*Bp. Hall*].

Vers. 9—12. *Prove.* The condescending goodness of God gives not only to the godly, but sometimes to the ungodly, opportunity and challenge to prove his truth and power; and it is the duty of a minister of God, as it was of the prophet, not only to point both classes to it, but even to offer them this proving of God, confident as Elijah against Ahab, as Isaiah against Ahaz, that God will not forsake his servants, but will by the event put to shame all unbelief [*Lange*].

Vers. 13—15. *Stout words.* Rash, undigested, ill-considered speech, is responsible for much of the heart-burning and trouble in the Churches. Expressions which convey the impression that the Lord acts unjustly or unkindly, especially if they fall from the lips of men of known character and experience,

are as dangerous as fire-brands among stubble; they are used for blasphemous purposes by the ill-disposed, and the timid and trembling are sure to be cast down thereby, and to find reason for yet deeper distress of soul [*Spurgeon*].

"Language is the dress of thought" [*Johnson*].

Vers. 16—18. *Spake often.* When the wicked are talking against God, the righteous should talk for him. Religious conversation is necessary, all the more, for the very reasons that chill and repress it. When a fire burns low, the coals that are alive should be brought near together, that they may be blown into a flame. So when all is cold and dead, living Christians should draw near and seek the breathings of the Spirit, and kindle each other by mutual utterance. The words thus and then spoken shall be heard and recorded in heaven [*Lange*].

"The Chronicles of heaven shall keep
Their words in transcript fair;
In the Redeemer's book of life
Their names recorded are" [*Doddridge*].

CHAPTER IV.

Critical Notes.] **The ungodly admonished for the day]** of judgment. **Results to the wicked awful. Burn] as an oven]** or furnace (cf. Matt. vi. 30). "A fire burns more fiercely in a furnace than in the open air" [*Hengs.*]. **The proud]** called happy (ch. iii. 15), and **all the wicked]** like **stubble]** fit for fire: destroyed "root and branch," *i. e.* utterly. **2.]** To the righteous, the day an advent of justice and salvation. **Sun]** The Messiah set forth as most glorious and beneficent. What the sun is to the natural, he is to the moral world; the source of light, life, and beauty. **Wings]** *i. e. beams*, "on account of the velocity and expansion with which they spread over the earth" (cf. Ps. cxxxix. 9) [*Henderson*]. **Go forth]** as from the prison of darkness and misery. **Grow up]** Lit. leap in joy and freedom, like calves let loose from the stall. "The simile is designed to convey the ideas of freedom from outward restraint and the enjoyment of self-conscious liberty" [*Henderson*]. **3. Tread]** The wicked, who were said to prosper, will be overcome; destroyed by the fire of judgment, they will lie like ashes on the ground. The condition of the godly reversed then. **4—6.]** Exhortation to avert coming judgment. Since no further communications were to be given, they were to remember those they already possessed. **The law]** A solemn admonition to Israel and to us, not to disregard God's word with its **statutes]** and **judgments]**, its morals and religion. **5.]** To avert the curse from Israel **the prophet]** would be sent to reform the nation—a prophet in the power and spirit of Elijah. This applied to the Baptist (Matt. xi. 14; xvii. 12, 13. **Dreadful day]** (cf. Joel ii. 31), the destruction of Jerusalem, but applicable to the last day; for "all God's judgments are hours, marked on the dial-plate, and struck by the alarm of that great day" [*Words.*]. **6. Turn]** Family harmony restored, say some; better, a reconciliation of ungodly, estranged from the piety of their ancestors and pious forefathers, by repentance. John's ministry removed family feuds, prepared multitudes for the Messiah, and thus laid the foundation for the recovery of thousands to the faith of the Gospel (cf. Luke i. 16, 17: Acts xxi. 20). **A curse]** Lit. a *ban*, one of the most awful words the Jews could use; fell upon Judea, by which it is devoted to destruction and excluded from common use—a desolation remaining to this day. This word, which closes the prophecy, and with it the Old Testament, should ever ring in our ears, and remind us of the more awful curse of the ungodly (1 Cor. xvi. 22: Rev. xx. 15).

HOMILETICS.

The Approach of the Judgment Day.—*Verses* 1—5.

The prophet confirms the preceding truth, awakens sinners in their slumber, and encourages saints in their faith by the prospect of a day of judgment: to punish some, reward others, and vindicate the ways of God.

I. A day of retribution to the wicked. To the ungodly "the day cometh

that shall burn as an oven." Those who are called blessed will then be cursed, and like stubble consumed by the fire. 1. *Utter destruction.* "It shall leave them neither root nor branch." "There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again;" but if torn up by the roots there is no hope, no chance of life. So there will be no escape nor mitigation of punishment. 2. *Universal destruction.* "All the proud" and "all that do wickedly" will be unable to resist when God reveals his justice. That day will test every man's character and condition. Wood and hay will be consumed, gold and silver will abide and be purified. "Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it (lay it open), because it shall be revealed by fire (judgment); and the fire shall try (prove) every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. iii. 13). **II. A day of salvation to the godly.** The day will be as *an oven* to the wicked, but a source of joy, a *sun* to the righteous. "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise." The sceptical complained that judgment did not fall upon the ungodly, and that justice was not given to the godly. But health, light, and everlasting salvation are promised. 1. *The light of life.* Darkness and disease shall be scattered away; warmth and gladness shall shine in Divine effulgence "Thy sun shall no more go down, for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light." 2. *The joy of freedom.* "Ye shall go forth" from darkness and captivity; become free and active, frisky and playful "as calves of the stall." This freshness of first love is only a foretaste of "the joy unspeakable, and full of glory." 3. *The conquest of foes.* Not mere freedom from oppression, but complete triumph over enemies. The wicked often prosper and trample upon the godly; but a reversal shall come to both classes. "He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." **III. A day of warning to all.** "For, behold, the day cometh," and lest any, even sinners, should be surprised, the trumpet-blast warns every one. 1. *By teachers commissioned from God.* "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet." Ministers and messengers announce the coming King, are sent to prepare the way, and call upon proud scoffers and wicked priests to heed the word. 2. *By the written word of God.* Prophecy and preaching may be temporary and uncertain, but the law of God is never suspended. The Scriptures warn and invite, encourage and threaten. If men forget the *living voice*, they must *remember the written law.* 3. *By the corrective providences of God.* Compassionate judgments come before the final judgment—providences which correct and do not destroy. God seeks to separate and purify men now, before the final separation and settlement, "to bring the disobedient to the wisdom of the just." Heed the warning now, lest you be smitten "with a curse" hereafter.

The Sun of Righteousness.—*Verse* 2.

There can be no doubt with respect to the application. Our Lord is elsewhere called *Light*, which in Hebrew poetry is used of the sun, as the source of light. What the sun is to the natural world, that the Messiah is to the moral. The invaluable spiritual blessings which he dispenses are all comprehended under the two heads here specified—righteousness and moral health (cf. Isa. lvii. 19). Both of these are indispensably requisite to the happiness of our guilty and depraved race, and from no other quarter can they be obtained than from him "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" [*Henderson*]. In this image we have many truths suggested.

I. Christ is the source of light. Whatever be the radiance of other lights, they borrow from him. The moon in her beauty and the stars in their brilliance only shed reflected lustre upon the world. Amid ignorance, error, and sin, he is the light of truth, holiness, and God, in person, doctrine, and work. "I am the light of the world." **II. Christ is the source of life.** "With healing in his wings." Sin brought death into the world. Christ quickens the dead in trespasses and sins. As the sun in spring rouses dormant energies of nature, and clothes trees

and fields with beauty, so Christ is the essential principle and primal source of spiritual life. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." **III. Christ is the source of beauty.** To the sun we owe the bright colours which delight our eyes, and the golden beams which gladden our hearts. He tints the sky, paints the flowers, and adorns all nature. Beauty "is the fringe of the garment of God." Christ blesses the soul and beautifies the life with purity and praise. His grace removes moral deformity, and prepares for eternal perfection. **IV. Christ is the source of joy.** When the sun bursts through the clouds, and pours floods of light over the earth, the birds begin to sing, and children shout for joy. It smiles upon the cottage of the poor, cheers and brings new life to the fainting heart. Joy in Christ may be overcast, but will break out again with greater sweetness and splendour. "And as the morning light he shall arise—a sun" (2 Sam. xxiii. 4).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND OUTLINES.

Ver. 1. The oven, the fuel, the intensity of the heat. The throne (of the Ancient of days) was a fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him.

Ver. 2. *Sun of righteousness.* 1. As asserting and vindicating the righteousness of God, called in question by blasphemers. 2. As bestowing upon his people a double righteousness (imputed and imparted), as the sun doth light (John i. 16). It is further said that he *shall arise*, that is, he shall appear and show himself on earth, who now lieth hid, as it were, in heaven, as the material sun doth under the horizon. 1. He was manifest in the flesh, out of the bosom of the Father, out of the types of the law. 2. In the whole course of his life he enlightened and warmed the dark and dry hearts of men, and filled them with fruits of righteousness (John xv. 5). 3. He is still in continual motion for the good of the Church, as the sun in heaven for the good of the world. Under a cloud in his passion, he broke forth again in his resurrection. From heaven he daily darts forth his beams of righteousness, and showers down all spiritual blessings in heavenly privileges (Ephes. i. 3). *Lastly*, at the great day he will show himself in a special manner a "Sun of righteousness;" clearing all obscurities, bringing to light the hidden things of darkness, causing his people's most holy faith, that now lies hid in great part, to be found to praise, honour, and glory, cheering up their spirits after manifold tribulations, and healing all their spiritual maladies [*Trapp*].

Healing in his wings. 1. Moral sickness of men. 2. Christ the great Physician. 3. Faith the method of cure. Trust, rest *under* his wings, for shelter and salvation.

Go forth and grow up as calves. The figure sets forth—1. Slavery. 2. Freedom. 3. Activity. 4. Growth. 5. Joy. "*Grow up;* more probably *bound*, as the animal which has been confined exults in its regained freedom, itself full of life and exuberance of delight" [*Pusey*]. They were before in *darkness* and *disease*, both of which *confine*. But the Sun of righteousness arises, health is restored, they become free and active. They go forth and grow up as calves of the stall. No creatures, perhaps, increase so rapidly and observedly as these, when, as here, they are well attended and fed, for the very purpose of fattening [*Jay*].

Ver. 3. *The great reversal.* The wicked overcome, trampled upon as *ashes*. Victory visible and complete to the saints (Micah iv. 12, 13: Joel iii. 14: Rom. xvi. 20).

HOMILETICS.

Remembering the Law.—*Verse* 4.

The prophet closes with special directions to the people. **Since no other messenger was to follow him, till Jesus and his forerunner should come, they must**

consult and remember the written word. Malachi thus closes by showing what must be done to escape the curse and secure the salvation of God at the judgment day. A needed lesson for us.

I. **Remember the end of the law.** To be the standard of faith and practice; to guide our feet in paths of righteousness; to help in times of darkness and perplexity; and never to supersede, but ever confirm, the teaching of the ministry. The law foreshadows the gospel. Malachi, the last of the prophets, exhorts us to remember Moses, and preaches Christ, in whom the law and the prophets are fulfilled. Thus in every age we learn the importance and the necessity of a careful study of the written word. II. **Remember the auth rity of the law.** "Which I commanded him." The law of *Moses* is the word of *God*, given in thunder and smoke, by the ministry of angels and the finger of God. Nature teaches that if we believe in the existence we should submit to the authority of God. Hence Numa, Lycurgus, and Mahomet derived their laws from heaven to secure obedience on earth. The Bible takes the place of "open vision," and is the representative of God in the world. To neglect it is to despise and to disobey it, to reject the authority of God. "Obey my voice, and do all which I command you." III. **Remember the reward of obedience to the law.** Duty is performed not by respect to some enactment, nor by general consent, but sincere obedience to the whole law, "with the statutes and judgments." Forgetfulness is the source of every evil. Faithful remembrance will lead to Christ, and prepare for judgment. "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."

ELIJAH'S MINISTRY A TYPE OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.—*Verses* 5, 6.

Christ is not easily recognized in his coming among men. Hence, lest they should mistake, warnings are given, and messengers are sent to prepare the way. Elijah's ministry is again realized in the person of the Baptist. Like the prophet, John was to be endowed with extraordinary gifts to fit him for his work. His ministry is commended for the *aim* and the *efficacy* of it, and may be taken as a type of the Christian ministry.

I. **A ministry Divinely commissioned.** "I will send you Elijah." It was presumption to intrude into the priestly office of old, and to take unwarranted commission is to usurp authority in the Church. Christ himself was not self-commissioned. How then shall his servants "preach except they be sent"? An ambassador must have *express* authority and instructions from his sovereign. "He who is called to instruct souls is called of God, and not by his own ambition," says Bernard. John appeared by command, in the name of a royal personage, and made a royal proclamation. What John's preaching was all preaching should be—the voice, the vocation of God to men. To the uncalled awful failure may result. "I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord" (Jer. xxiii. 32). II. **A ministry moral in its design.** John was a *reformer*. Political theories and metaphysical disputes were not for him to settle. "Repent," was the cry which resounded in the wilderness, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 1. *It prepared for Christ.* "I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee." The true minister by his life and preaching will "make ready a prepared people for the Lord." 2. *It saved from curse.* Elijah was to come to prepare God's people, lest at his coming he "smite the earth with a curse." The destruction of Jerusalem, the curse of Judæa, and the sufferings of the Jews remind us of the Canaanites in the past, and of the impenitent in the future. But the minister of God will warn every man, and urge every man to flee for refuge to the hope set before him in the gospel. III. **A ministry blessed in its results.** "He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children," &c. **Alienated from God, men are alienated from one another The Jews had**

fallen away from the faith of their ancestors, and were at strife with the Gentiles. But John, in the spirit and power of Elias, brought back the faithless generations of his day to the God of their fathers, and "restored (regulated, reformed) all things" (Matt. xvii. 11). Families are now disturbed by worldliness, hatred, and apostasy. Ungodly sons are at variance with godly parents. Society is estranged from God. Love, the bond of union, is broken. Ministers have to fill up the chasm, unite all classes, and bring men back to God. Their work is a reformation, a *restitution* to original peace and purity, "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to (by) the wisdom of the just" (or righteous) (Luke i. 17). Thus men will be restored to mutual affection, benevolence will accompany true religion, and morally a new heaven and earth will be created by the gospel. Hearts and lives will be prepared for the coming, and people will enroll themselves as willing subjects of the heavenly kingdom. "The number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 4. 1. Men never left without a rule of life. If not the living voice, they have the written law, a law "for *all Israel*." 2. Men apt to forget this rule of life. "*Remember* the law of Moses." "Even when we have made considerable advances in knowledge, we must still retain the first principles of practical religion, and resolve to abide by them. Those that study the writings of the prophets and the Apocalypse must still remember the law of Moses and the four Gospels."

> "Men are men; the best sometimes forget" [*Shakespeare*].

Ver. 5. *John's resemblance to Elijah.* 1. In the endowments of his mind. 2. In the habits of his life. 3. In the exercise of his ministry. There were many points between Elijah and John. Both prophesied in a time of great unbelief and apostasy from the law; both sought to bring back the people to the piety of their fathers; both prophesied before great and terrible judgments. The historical circumstances in which they lived were remarkably parallel. Ahab appears in Herod, Jezebel in Herodias. The words of Mark vi. 20, where he speaks of Herod fearing John, and did many things, may apply without any alteration to Ahab. Their very appearance, the fashion of their dress, and their mode of life were identical [*Lange*]. Both fell on evil times; both witnessed fearlessly for God; neither was much seen save in the direct exercise of their ministry; both were at the head of schools of disciples; the result of the ministry of both might be expressed in the same terms: "*many* (not all, nor even the majority, but still many) of the children of Israel did they turn to the Lord their God [*D. Brown*].

Ver. 6. The words indicate the work of the Christian minister. A *reconciler* turning men's hearts towards God and one another. A *herald* to announce the approach of Christ. A *pioneer* to prepare the way. He has to awaken right feeling, warn of coming judgment, and point to Christ as the only hope of escape. "Flee from the wrath to come."

The closing of the Old Testament in Malachi is unspeakably solemn. On its last leaf we find the blessing and the curse, life and death, set before us. As its first page tells us of the sin and curse of our first parents, so its last speaks of the law given by Moses, of sin, and the curse following, mingled with promises of the grace which was to come by Jesus Christ. So on the last page of the New Testament we read of "plagues written in this book," but its last words are gracious words: "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" [*Lange*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1. *Proud.* Heaven often regulates effects by their causes, and pays the wicked what they have deserved [*Corneille*].

Ver. 2. *Sun.* The self-same sun that shines upon his court hides not his visage from our cottage, but looks on both alike [*Shakespeare*].

"O sun! of this great world both eye and soul"
[*Milton*].

Ver. 4. *Law.* Prize the word of God by the *worth* of it, that you may not come to prize it by the want of it [*Dyer*]. There never was found, in any age of the world, either religion or law that did so highly exalt the public good as the Bible [*Bacon*]. *Remember.* Memory, like books which remain a long time shut up in the dust, needs to be opened from time to time; it is necessary, so to speak, to open its leaves, that it may be ready in time of need [*Seneca*].

Ver. 5. *Elijah.* Since the days that John began to preach, since he began to call the world to repentance, there has been a rush into the kingdom of God. Men, roused from their spiritual slumbers, startled by a sense of their own sin and ruin, have earnestly applied for pardon and salvation. The echo of the words he proclaimed on the Jordan still lingers and rings in the souls of men, and the result is a pressing every day into the empire of redemptive truth [*Dr. Thomas*].

Ver. 6. *Curse.* Parting words are always solemn, as closing the past, and opening out a future of expectation before us. The position of Malachi, as the last of the prophets, bids us more solemnly prepare for that dread day—our Lord's second coming—which he foretold, in one with the first, warning us that we deceive not ourselves, in unconsciousness of our own evil and remembrance of our seeming good, until he profess unto us, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity" [*Pusey*].

And of the *twelve prophets* let the memorial be blessed, and let their bones flourish again out of their place (Eccles. xlix. 10).

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